Mikhail Botvinnik

The Life and Games of a World Chess Champion

Andy Soltis

McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers

Mikhail Botvinnik

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To Marcy, the inspiration for all my works

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Preface

Why, my wife asked me, would anyone want to read about such a cold personality as Mikhail Botvinnik? That's not fair, I began to reply. But at that point I was already half way through researching this book and yet hadn't asked myself another question: Why did I want to *write* about him?

I had mixed emotions. Botvinnik first made a strong impression on me when I spent a weekend, at age 14, playing as many of the "selected games" from his first English-language collection as I could. But I didn't understand his games. Or like them. They seemed to me the clinical, methodical antithesis of the games of my hero, Mikhail Tal.

But as I grew older I began to appreciate the play of Botvinnik, just as I slowly learned to respect that of Emanuel Lasker, Viktor Korchnoi, Vladimir Kramnik and others with a hard-to-define style. I had to be impressed, too, by Botvinnik's impressive plus-scores against opponents such as Vasily Smyslov, Alexander Alekhine, David Bronstein, Paul Keres, Samuel Reshevsky, Miguel Najdorf and many, many others.

His contribution to opening theory was immense, I knew. But I slowly learned that he had also rewritten much of *endgame* theory. And I was struck by the irony that Botvinnik was the first player to take a professional approach to chess — while he was the very rare elite player who also had a second profession, as a scientist.

When I looked over Russian-language magazines and Web sites, I was surprised by how much Botvinnik remained a topic of fascination, years after his death. Garry Kasparov, Anatoly Karpov, Boris Spassky, Korchnoi, Yuri Averbakh and their colleagues seemed to mention him regularly in interviews. Moreover, Botvinnik's ideas continue to resonate. Some were general concepts, such as his methodical, now widely-copied, approach to opening preparation. Some of his ideas were more specific. A quick g2–g4 by White, much analyzed in various closed and semi-closed openings in the 21st century, might be traced to the justly celebrated game Botvinnik–Alatortsev, Leningrad 1934. And when Kasparov was asked in 2013 about his mentorship of Magnus Carlsen, he said he relied on the techniques of Botvinnik's school when he attended it from 1973 to 1978.

There have been several collections of Botvinnik's games, including his own three-volume *Shakhmatnoye Tvorchestvo Botvinnika (Chess Creativity of Botvinnik)* and four-volume *Analiticheskiye i Kriticheskiye Raboty (Analytical and Critical Works)*. But they say little about Botvinnik the person.

His first memoir, *K Dostizheniyu Tseli (Achieving the Aim)*, is more revealing. But it is, at the same time, self-serving and often more than disingenuous. It also lacks much of the political context that is essential to understanding the man. After all, politics played more of a role in Botvinnik's career than in any other world champion's.

And the politics kept changing. He was born under a monarchy, lived through a revolution, a civil war, the brutal collectivization and famine, the Terror, a second world war and a cold war, the end of Stalin and a "thaw," the malaise of the 1960s and 1970s, the Gorbachev reforms of *glasnost* and *perestroika* and, at age 80, the end of the Soviet Union and the beginning of an uncertain new Russia that is still trying to define itself.

Soviet chess went through comparable turmoil including the arrest and execution of one of Botvinnik's mentors, several of his benefactors and a best friend and the wartime death of other allies of his. Botvinnik's ability to not only survive but thrive during these times, as well as his dealings, direct or indirect, with Josef Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Lavrentia Beria, Leonid Brezhnev and others, needs to be explained.

Botvinnik downplayed the political intrigues in his memoirs or left the reader to look between the lines. For example, when Soviet authorities balked at sending delegates to the first major FIDE meeting after World War II, it seriously endangered Botvinnik's chances of becoming world champion. He recalled how he and Vyacheslav Ragozin visited Lieut. General Alexei Kuznetsov, a member of the Communist Party's powerful Central Committee, whom they had known since before the war. "Don't worry, everything will be all right," said Kuznetsov, Botvinnik wrote. And so it was. But he failed to mention that Kuznetsov would soon be purged, arrested and, in 1950, executed.

With more than 1,100 to choose from, I had to be highly selective in picking games that illustrate Botvinnik's life. I did not include many of the familiar victories as well as draws, such as his miraculous adjournment saves against Max Euwe at Groningen 1946 and against Bobby Fischer at Varna 1962. I had nothing to add to what has already been said, many times and brilliantly, about them.

The most difficult task was dealing with the inevitable conflicts between sources. Whom do you trust when facts are in sharp dispute, as they are so often in the life of Botvinnik? Once Botvinnik is given his due, what credence should be placed in the words of David Bronstein, Boris Vainshtein and others who so sharply opposed him? I've chosen to give credit to the critics but at least equal attention to the people who knew him better, such as Averbakh, Viktor Malkin, Lev Abramov, and the great chroniclers of Soviet chess history, such as Sergei Voronkov.

Mikhail Moiseyevich Botvinnik was a mystery to many of his contemporaries. This book is an attempt to explain him in the context of today.

Introduction

On July 15, 1952, eight of the world's ten best chessplayers gathered in a room at an elite State Planning Committee rest home in Voronovo, Russia. They had been training with one another to prepare for the fall's world chess federation (FIDE) team tournament in Helsinki. The opportunity was important because a Soviet victory would promote Soviet culture and way of life and, of course, Communism. It was no accident that chess was under the direct control of the Soviet Union's state Department of Propaganda and Agitation.

But the agenda for this meeting, at the rest home southwest of Moscow, was unique, according to the detailed minutes. The unstated subject: Whether to kick World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik off the Soviet team. The players had been summoned by apparatchiks of the Committee on Physical Culture and Sport (known as the Sports Committee), which governed chess as well as physical sports. It was led by a military officer, Lt. Gen. V.P. Vinogradov. His deputy, a Comrade Ivanov, began by saying that the Botvinnik matter was urgent. The Soviet Union would be participating for the first time in an Olympiad. Everyone in the room understood that anything less than gold medals would be unthinkable in the Stalin era.

But Botvinnik was clearly in poor form. He had just lost training games at Voronovo to Tigran Petrosian and Isaak Boleslavsky. They were among the nine Soviet players fighting for the six spots on the Olympiad team. But no one considered them world championship caliber in 1952. If Botvinnik played this badly in Finland — and lost to Samuel Reshevsky of the United States, Miguel Najdorf of Argentina or Svetozar Gligorić of Yugoslavia — it would be "scandalous," recalled Yuri Averbakh, who was present at the meeting. During that Cold War era, "the world champion didn't have the right to lose to foreign rivals," he said.

Ivanov began the meeting by saying he had spoken to Alexander Kotov about the Botvinnik problem. No one in the room had to be told who Sasha Kotov was. He had won the 1952 interzonal but was also connected to powerful figures in the Soviet Communist Party. "Comrade Kotov reported that all the chessplayers with whom he spoke considered [Botvinnik's] sporting form untrustworthy." Even Comrade Ragozin felt that way, Kotov had said.

That, too, was significant. Vyacheslav Ragozin, known to friends as Slava, was perhaps the only strong chessplayer in the world that Mikhail Botvinnik trusted absolutely. Ragozin and Botvinnik had been allies, sparring partners and close friends for nearly two decades. Comrade Smyslov also agreed with the consensus, according to the minutes of the meeting. But "he fears to speak the truth" when talking directly to Botvinnik, Ivanov added. Vasily Smyslov, the tall, shy, red-headed Muscovite who many believed — correctly — would be the next world champion, was in many ways the opposite of the confrontational Botvinnik.

Vinogradov laid out his plan. The world champion would be replaced on the team by 27-year-old Yefim Geller. The reason was Botvinnik's recent "unsuccessful results" — a mere fifth place in the 1951 Soviet Championship and a third at the Géza Maróczy Memorial at Budapest in March and April 1952. Paul Keres was the first of the elite grandmasters in the room to speak. Botvinnik's chief Soviet rival for more than 10 years, he said that since the 1948 world championship match-tournament, Botvinnik's results had significantly declined. His play creates serious doubt, Keres said.

The meeting continued in a "very tense, nervous" atmosphere, Averbakh recalled. Next up was Smyslov. "I told Botvinnik and didn't hide it, that it's better if he didn't play on the team," he said. Boleslavsky, the timid opening innovator who rarely spoke — and when he did, never spoke badly about a rival — offered lukewarm support: If Botvinnik played poorly in Helsinki, he could be replaced there, he said. The USSR would bring along strong reserve players. But making the trip without the world champion would look bad.

David Bronstein spoke next and his view was easy to predict. He despised Botvinnik and would never overcome the pain of failing to beat him in the 1951 world championship match. Bronstein explained why Boleslavsky's idea would not work. A world champion can *only* play on first board. If he were placed on second board it would mean the first-board player was his superior, a ludicrous contradiction. Bronstein continued, according to the minutes: Why did Botvinnik's play deteriorate? Because he rarely plays, he doesn't follow latest opening theory and he gets into time pressure. Of course, if it were possible to put Keres on first board there would be no doubt about the team's success. But the poor form of Botvinnik summons up alarm from all team members, Bronstein added.

Then it was Salo Flohr's turn. "I speak not as a helper of Botvinnik nor as his lawyer but as a chessplayer, a grandmaster," said the man who had made Botvinnik internationally known in their match 19 years before. It is true that the young play well, Flohr said, and Botvinnik has his defects. Botvinnik himself acknowledges them and tries to correct them. Yes, he gets into time trouble but tries to avoid it, Flohr added. Keres was first in the most recent Soviet Championship, he said. But in the next championship Keres could be sixth. Bronstein learned how to play from Botvinnik and it's unbecoming for him to criticize him, Flohr said.

Moreover, Botvinnik has an iron character, Flohr asserted — and no one in the room could disagree. We have no second chessplayer like that, he added. Of course, no one can guarantee success, Flohr said. But "in my view a team without the world champion would create general amazement in the USSR and abroad." He added that the other team members were governed by their "personal interests."

The Red Card

At this point Ivanov played the trump card: the Red one. Everyone in the room must speak directly, openly, according to Bolshevism, he said. This must be done so that the Soviet team takes first place. Kotov used the opportunity to speak openly, by attacking Botvinnik's only defender. Flohr had offended all those present by suspecting the strongest Soviet players of pursuing personal agendas, he said.

A new voice returned attention to the Party. Vladimir Alatortsev had been a Botvinnik rival in the 1930s, then Smyslov's trainer, was now rising in the apparatchik ranks and would head the Soviet chess federation from 1955 to 1961. Comrade Botvinnik, *as a Communist,* should clearly answer all the questions put to him, he said. (That Botvinnik was one of the few masters who had been allowed to join the Party before was known to all in the room.)

The meeting's minutes, preserved by Bronstein and published only in 2003, give Botvinnik's reply. It is true, he said, that there is no unity visible among team members. It is important to discuss this, he said. But Botvinnik had a question for Ivanov: What do you expect of the team? Ivanov answered that he expected first place for the team. *And board prizes on every board.* This was a stunning demand. In the 17 Olympiads in which they took part, the Soviets would never come close to winning board prizes on every board.

Ivanov returned the subject to the world champion: Botvinnik should answer all the questions, he said. More than 60 years later, the reader may wonder: What did the men in that room — as well as the *vlasti*, the higher authorities in Moscow — really expect from Botvinnik? In a country where self-criticism was part of the deeply imbedded ideology, certainly they wanted a mea culpa, a humiliating confession that he had played badly in recent events. But more than that, Sports Committee demanded *guarantees* of success.

Botvinnik understood the meeting to be Sports Committee's way of securing his iron-clad assurance that he would have the best score of anyone on first board in Helsinki. That was something the apparatchiks could present to their superiors to show they had performed their service to the Party. Then if the player failed to win, he could be punished. Of course, no chessplayer could honestly guarantee victory. Yet some did. But they were not Mikhail Moiseyevich Botvinnik.

He refused point blank to give answers — and asked permission to question the other members of the team. *Nyet,* said Ivanov. In view of Comrade Botvinnik's unwillingness to answer, he announced, the meeting is over.

As always, Botvinnik was playing his own game. He wanted the selection of the team decided at a level higher than Sports Committee, where he had his share of enemies, according to Averbakh. Sports Committee was attached to the Council of Ministers, the main Soviet governmental, as opposed to Party, authority. But Botvinnik had gone over — far over — the heads of the apparatchiks many times before and appealed to the grandees of the Party. Josef Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov and countless others had been his benefactors for decades.

But this time his plan backfired. The higher *vlasti* did not intervene. Instead, the

Party's powerful Central Committee made the final decision: Botvinnik was out. Keres went to Helsinki as first board. The result was nearly disastrous. Only a final spurt of 10–2 allowed the heavily favored Soviets to beat out Najdorf's Argentina for first place and the gold medals. Keres had 6½ points out of 12, the worst-ever performance by a Soviet player on first board of an Olympiad team. And Botvinnik got his revenge at the next Soviet Championship, as he liked to point out in later years. He scored 4–1 against five of the players who took his place in Helsinki.

"He Couldn't Live Otherwise"

"Revenge" is a recurring word in the Botvinnik story. "I would call him a man of sporting *revansh* [revenge]," said Andre Lilienthal, who knew him for sixty years. But another recurring word is "character" as in the "hard character" that he always attributed to himself. Some of his opponents found him remote and distant. "Botvinnik was unsociable, closed," said Yugoslav GM Borislav Ivkov. "He could have traveled the whole world, played, taken delight in life but he hid himself somewhere near Moscow in a *dacha*," or summer home, he said. Botvinnik himself conceded, "As has been known for a long time, I am a very solitary person and have very few relations with the outside world."

But he was not remote to everyone. He was exceptionally loyal. "He was considered a very closed person but if help was needed, Mikhail Moiseyevich completely transformed," Boris Spassky said. And Botvinnik was driven: When he knew what he wanted, no one could convince him otherwise.

Late in life his beloved wife Gayane became mentally ill and had episodes so bad she had to be hospitalized, according to Viktor Malkin, a longtime friend. During one of the episodes her doctors asked permission to transfer her to the Moscow-area facility Stolbovoye. Botvinnik refused. "He was warned that this was dangerous since the possibility of suicide could not be excluded," Malkin wrote. She could break the window glass and jump to her death, he was told. Botvinnik's logic would not allow this: The same tragic thing could happen at Stolbovoye, he said. No, was the reply, Stolbovoye had unbreakable glass. "That just means I will put such glass in the windows of my apartment," Botvinnik replied. And he took his wife home. "I don't know what happened then," Malkin wrote. "But soon Gayane Davidovna improved."

Loyal, yes. Confident of his decisions, absolutely. And also confident in his gifts. When he was asked to describe his abilities, Botvinnik replied: "Rather long ago, when the number of civil aviation accidents had increased, one senior official of the USSR Sports Committee said that if Botvinnik headed Aeroflot, there would be no crashes. He would not allow it." To others, this sounded like sheer arrogance. But to Botvinnik, it simply confirmed what he believed was true. He would not allow it.

Botvinnik was also extremely practical. This was a sharp contrast from many of the dreamers and fantasists he met over the board. Bronstein, for example, was famous for his useless purchases when traveling to tournaments abroad. Bronstein had four criteria:

Whatever he bought had to be something he didn't have. It had to be heavy. It had to be costly. And it must be completely inappropriate in the USSR. So he brought home golf clubs to a country without golf courses. Or Georges Simenon novels in French, which he couldn't read.

Botvinnik was the opposite. If there was an object in his home that he hadn't used in the previous five years, "It means that I don't need it." He would simply throw it out. In addition, his daughter said, "he couldn't abide disorder. His home had to be clean and everything in its place. He never left unwashed dishes. "Wash, wipe and place them on the table in the strictly assigned place," she said. "He couldn't live otherwise."

He had simple, Spartan tastes. This led to his falling out with Yefim Geller. Botvinnik had invited Geller to be one of his helpers and they went to his *dacha*. This would have been a powerful pooling of talent: Geller with his outstanding ability to find hidden resources in the opening, middlegame or ending would be working with Botvinnik, whose pragmatism would overcome Geller's practical failings.

But within five days Geller bolted the *dacha,* leaving without a warning. The reason is that Geller loved to eat. He told his wife Oksana he "was famished for several days. For breakfast they ate porridge spread on a plate." For Geller, who at home would get up at night and cook himself scrambled eggs, using 10 eggs, the Botvinnik lifestyle was unbearable. But to Botvinnik, Geller's appetite was a character flaw that helped explain why he never became world champion. Like Botvinnik.

Botvinnik's Rules

Botvinnik had rules for almost everything. Many were based on his own experience. He refused to teach his daughter how to play chess when she was young because he did not learn until he was 12. He even discouraged her when she wanted to learn to read at age 4. But when she eventually did learn, he not only told her what to read but how to hold a book. "From the notebook to the eye there must be 30 centimeters," he said. "One cannot look at it closer, or you'll spoil your eyesight, as I did."

His capacity for work was legendary. He reserved the highest praise for chessplayers who were "researchers." Players who didn't meet his standards were "lazy," a term he applied to even Smyslov, Mikhail Tal and Ragozin. On the other hand, Botvinnik enjoyed his free time, especially at the summer home he designed himself and fought the bureaucracy to build. He loved ballet and poetry and memorized several Russian poems, modern and classical. His sports "weakness," as a friend put it, was soccer. He rarely let pass a radio account of a big game in Moscow, if he couldn't see it at Luzhniki Stadium in person.

When asked about Botvinnik's relations with colleagues, Spassky recalled: "One time Botvinnik went to some tournament abroad and wanted to buy a gift for his, as they say now, sponsor, the minister of electrification of the USSR Dmitry Zhimerin. But there was little money because then chessplayers earned little. So Botvinnik and Smyslov were strolling and Botvinnik is suffering and finally says 'Vasily Vasilyevich, help.' Smyslov

thinks a long time and answers: 'You know, Mikhail Moiseyevich, you above all should take into consideration that Comrade Zhimerin helped you out of the state wallet and you're paying out of your own.' Botvinnik replied, 'Much thanks!"' This was unusual — because normally *he* was the one dispensing advice.

In 1969 when Botvinnik was training for a possible match with Bobby Fischer, he and Spassky went to a bazaar in Pitsunda, a favorite resort town of Soviet leaders and the cultural elite. A vendor recognized the new world champion. "I want to make you a gift of a watermelon," he said to Spassky. Spassky tried to refuse. Botvinnik took him by the shoulder and told him he had an obligation to his fans. "Take the watermelon and shake his hand," he said. You have to learn what it's like to be a champion, was the message. Spassky did as he was told.

The Botvinnik Contradictions

As profound a thinker as Botvinnik was, he could be astoundingly wrong, world-class wrong. He spent his final 30 years working "in the wrong direction in computers," Yuri Averbakh pointed out. Botvinnik tried to perfect a chess algorithm that emphasized evaluation rather than calculation and brute force. "Botvinnik wanted to make a machine that works like our brain. But he did not know how our brain works," Averbakh said. His program, Pioneer, was a failure.

Then there was the political Botvinnik. He was a devout Marxist-Leninist who regarded Stalin as less of a true Communist than he was. When he wrote an article about World War II he praised Stalin as a "*Vozhd"* or great leader, who had battled "enemies of the people ... with Jesuitical adroitness" and had seen through the duplicity of Britain and France when they tried to ally with the USSR before the war. This was the Party line in 1939. But Botvinnik was still repeating it in an article that appeared in 1995, shortly before his death.

Botvinnik's student Vladimir Kramnik was stunned by his views. "Botvinnik sincerely believes in the ideals of Communism.... And yet he was a very intellectual and intelligent man.... It's a puzzle to me how he managed to reconcile communistic views and the true character of an intellectual. This inconsistency amazed me. Because the Soviet intelligentsia, as a rule, showed merely hypocritical respect to the ideals of communism, it was all the rules of the game." The implications was he was not a "careerist" looking for political protection or advancement. Botvinnik was a true believer, Kramnik said. Another Soviet-raised grandmaster, Boris Gulko, said, "Botvinnik was a Communist by conviction.... He was by any measure honest and sincere. He considered that Communism was the future and declared that Soviet people were the best on the planet."

Some of the Botvinnik contradictions may be explained by his ability to program himself, to convince himself absolutely that he was doing the right thing, treating people the right way, even if this meant harshly. This was shown, for example, in what the Russians called "sporting malice."

Viktor Korchnoi cited this quality when he divided chessplayers into two groups.

The first was composed of those who need to view their opponents as friends in order to play with confidence. Players like this were Bronstein, Spassky, Geller and Keres. They wanted a *partner,* not an opponent. During their 1965 candidates match, Keres and Spassky spent their free days together, for example. In the second Geller–Spassky candidates match, the two players relaxed by playing cards, checkers and dominoes together.

No one could imagine Botvinnik doing anything like that. He belonged to the second group. This was composed of players who needed to hate their opponents to play well, Korchnoi said. Sporting malice may have originated much earlier, by Alexander Alekhine and Aron Nimzowitsch. But Botvinnik seemed to perfect it. He had to find a reason to hate each of his world championship match opponents, according to Malkin. The only world championship matches he won were rematches. Or, in Russian, "*revansh* matches"—revenge matches.

Botvinnik was also extraordinarily suspicious. "On the whole he seemed to me to be a misanthrope," said Averbakh, who became his sparring partner in secret training games in the 1950s. Botvinnik didn't expect anything good of people he met, he said. He recalled visiting Botvinnik's *dacha* on a Sunday. Averbakh's wife came with a fresh cake from Moscow's Cafe National, which was famed for its confections. Everyone admired the cake when it appeared on the lunch table. "But only at supper, when the cake again appeared on the table, did Botvinnik allow himself to eat it," Averbakh said. By that time he had "convinced himself that everyone who ate it at lunch was all right."

Botvinnik Style

Kramnik, who studied at his celebrated school for youngsters, came to the conclusion that Botvinnik didn't bring anything new to chess. "As 'criminal' as it may sound, I don't think that he advanced chess, introduced something quite new in the game," he wrote on the Web site www.e3e5.com.

But, of course, Botvinnik did create something new, including a Botvinnik style. And once he did, he couldn't change. On a trip to West Germany with him, veteran Soviet chess official Mikhail Beilin noticed that in simultaneous exhibitions, he conducted "the struggle on all boards 'in the Botvinnik style.'" "Let's say, he plays the English Opening as White, he creates pawn chains, seizes a positional initiative and dictates defensive moves to his opponent as if prompting him. 'Mikhail Moiseyevich,' I asked. 'Why don't you play a bit simpler, allow opponents to improvise, give them a chance to err?'" "I don't know how to play differently,' Botvinnik replied—in such a tone that said "*And I don't want to.*"

In one of his last interviews, on the occasion of his 80th birthday, Botvinnik told *64* magazine what playing chess had cost him. The tension during his world championship matches was enormous. The emotional toll of knowing that a single blunder could cost him his title was immense. It got so bad that around the time of the Petrosian match in 1963 his gums began to bleed. "I, of course, took measures," he said. "But after that I made the decision to end the fight for the title." Then he paused and added, "But they were good years."

1. Misha

Russian and Soviet sources say Mikhail Botvinnik was born at Repino, named after the 19th century painter Ilya Repin. But the tiny town, a summer getaway for the relatively affluent, became Repino in 1948, 37 years after Botvinnik was born on August 17, 1911. It was actually Kuokkala and, as that name indicates, was Finnish, located in the Grand Duchy of Finland, then within Tsar Nikolai II's empire. After the Russian Revolution it would be part of independent Finland and become Soviet only after the off-again, on-again Finnish-Soviet war that ended in 1944.

Botvinnik's roots were not in Finland or Russia but in Belarus. There his paternal grandfather lived as a tenant farmer, and his five sons worked on a farm at Kudrishchino, near Minsk. Among the sons was Moisei Lvovich Botvinnik (1878–1931), father of the future world champion, who remembered him as powerfully built. "He would seize a bull by the horns out of a herd and throw it on the ground," Mikhail Botvinnik said. Moisei Botvinnik also had a "severe character," and his son added, "Probably both my constitution and my character traits come from him."

Yes, and perhaps his political leanings as well. At age 27, Moisei Botvinnik left for Minsk to work in the underground anti-tsarist press. Three of his siblings, two brothers and a sister — that is Mikhail Botvinnik's uncles and an aunt — eventually emigrated to the United States. His father didn't stay in Minsk. After he "lost his teeth" because of "poisoning," he decided to become a dental technician, his son said, without elaboration. Moisei moved to the capital, St. Petersburg, to work as a dental assistant's apprentice after "he fell out with my grandfather," Botvinnik wrote. He earned a diploma and rented an apartment on Pushkin Street.

Botvinnik's mother, Seraphim Samoilovna Rabinovich (1879–1952), was also from Belarus. Her son said she grew up in a wooden house on the bank of the Western Dvina river at Kreslavka or, rather, the Jewish shtetl of Kraslava. She was also a political radical, having been exiled around the age of 22 to Siberia as a member of the General Jewish Labor Bund, a Socialist group that was put down by the tsar. She later became a Menshevik (a member of the minority faction) of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party that famously split with the Bolshevik (majority) faction. She was arrested again on December 10, 1905, for mimeographing subversive literature and exiled for another two years. We

know this because of documents that surfaced in 1928 when she tried to become a member of the Leningrad branch of an organization called the All-Union Soviet of Political Prisoners.

After two years of exile in Siberia, Seraphim came to St. Petersburg and worked as a dentist in the dispensary of the huge Obukhov metal factory, a hotbed of radicalism. One day she met a handsome, bearded man, Moisei Botvinnik, on Pushkin Street. They married, she quit her job and they settled in a large apartment at Nevsky Prospekt, number 88.

If geography foretells history, their home was a prophetic location. The Nevsky Prospekt was the city's jewel thoroughfare and had a rich chess past. At Nevsky, number 86, for example, the great St. Petersburg tournament of 1895-96, with Emanuel Lasker, William Steinitz, Harry Nelson Pillsbury and Mikhail Chigorin, was held.

Mikhail Botvinnik, like most world champions,* was the second son of the family. He was three years younger than his only brother Isaak, known as Issy or Isya. Botvinnik, invariably called Misha then, fondly recalled growing up with him at Nevsky, 88. "There we had a large, sunny flat of seven rooms on the third floor; there was a lift, and on the ground floor there was a doorkeeper," he told Gennady Sosonko in one of his last and most revealing interviews. "There was a cook and a maid and I remember that at one time my brother and I even had a nursery governess. Then came 1917."

Sauerkraut Soup

Botvinnik has given little indication of how the Russian Revolution and ensuing civil war affected his life. "In 1918 and 1919 we lived very modestly in Leningrad. We did not have much to eat," was one of his terse comments. More traumatic was 1920 when his mother fell ill and his father left the family to marry a noblewoman and begin a new family. "In general, after 1920 we were very poor," Botvinnik recalled. "My father gave us 120 rubles a month, which was a very, very modest amount." He and Isya "were very poorly dressed," which made them stand out in school, and they lived on inexpensive staples, such as sauerkraut soup.

In 2012 Botvinnik's daughter Olga (Fioshkina) added one intriguing detail: Moisei Botvinnik's profession called for him to buy gold for fillings. When he left the family he gave his wife more than a kilogram of gold (worth several hundred dollars, a small fortune in 1920). But she never used it. Instead, she hid it in a washstand for 21 years until Botvinnik donated it to Soviet national defense after the Nazi invasion in 1941.

Whether it was his parents' leanings or the sudden plunge from comfortable upper-middle class to barely making ends meet, Botvinnik's political ideas were formed early. "At the age of 9 I started reading newspapers and became a convinced Communist," he later wrote. How does one so young help the Party? One way was walking: He said he rarely rode in streetcars, even when they were free, because he didn't want to take advantage

**Including Viswanathan Anand, Boris Spassky, Emanuel Lasker, Vasily Smyslov and José Capablanca.*

of the state. He walked instead, "for the sake of War Communism," the harsh economic and political policies of 1918–1921.

Despite his claim to the vigorous strength of his father, Botvinnik was often ill as a child. With what he described as round shoulders and a flat chest, he didn't go in for sports. But a patient of his mother's left her a copy of Jørgen Peter Müller's celebrated book on gymnastics, *My System,* and from then on his health improved. Morning workouts remained part of his regimen until the very end of his life. (His mother, however, remained seriously ill and lived with her devoted son until her death from a brain hemorrhage on June 14, 1952. His father died in 1931.)

Both of Botvinnik's parents were Jewish — Moisei is derived from "Moses" — but he never showed any religious inclinations. "My parents were internationalists," he explained. His father could speak Yiddish but only Russian was allowed in their home. One of his brother's friends, Leonid (Lenya) Baskin, the son of a grocery owner who lived at Nevsky, 88, befriended Misha as well. One day Baskin and his parents took Botvinnik to a synagogue. He didn't go to another until the 1964 Olympiad was held in Tel Aviv, he recalled. These are the only religious experiences known in Botvinnik's life.

It was Baskin who taught Botvinnik how the chess pieces move, in the courtyard of Nevsky, 88, in September 1923. "In childhood I was attracted to many things but when in the fall of 1923 I became acquainted with chess, everything else was pushed to the side. Evidently the inclination of people to solve problems which don't have an exact solution told," he said. In his memoirs he added, "From that time I was forced to think, and this thinking was transformed into a 'profession.'"

William Steinitz was the only other world champion who learned the moves as late as he did, at 12. Botvinnik would later insist that the best age to start playing chess is 11 and 12, despite the insistence of celebrated Soviet teachers such as Vladimir Zak, who said that is much too late. But throughout his life, Botvinnik would cite his own example as the proper way to live. How else could one expect great success in life? His first games were played on a homemade board and set, "a square piece of plywood with the squares shaded in ink; the pieces of palm wood, thin and unstable. One bishop was missing and a lead soldier stood on the f1 square," he wrote in *Achieving the Aim,* his first memoir.

Beginning in September 1918 he attended the 157th United Labor School at Finsky Lane, 5, the same school as Isya. The school was located in the somewhat distant northwest Vyborg section of the city. But their mother chose it because it had a reputation of being experimental if not radical: The teachers had worked for no salary in the first three years after it was founded in 1905. Botvinnik walked each day to school along Liteiny Prospekt, a main thoroughfare leading to the Liteiny Bridge across the river to the Finland Station area. Another of history's greatest tournaments, St. Petersburg 1914, was held at Liteiny Prospekt, 10, so Botvinnik must have passed that building on the way to school.

We don't know how good a pupil Misha was. But by his account, he was a voracious reader and by nine he had gone through inexpensive, secondhand copies of classics by Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy and Gogol. This came with a price: Reading during Leningrad's "white nights" spoiled his eyesight, he said, and he wore glasses from an early age.

Isya was his role model. His brother got into the Komsomol, the junior wing of the Communist Party, and wanted to study engineering. But he had to settle for study at a secondary technical school and worked as a Leningrad tram driver. "He walked around in a uniform. He rooted greatly for me in competitions," Botvinnik recalled. "He came to the tournament hall without a ticket or pass — the unusual uniform hypnotized the doorkeepers." (In contrast, Botvinnik apparently had virtually nothing to say about his younger sister Maria, who, like him, graduated from Leningrad Polytechnic Institute. She died at age 90 on March 13, 2011.)

One of the stories most often told about Botvinnik's childhood — by his daughter Olga and by Anatoly Karpov, Mark Taimanov and others, concerns his retention of his father's *familiya* or surname. After his father left Nevsky, 88, he could have changed it.

The issue came up more than 60 years later when the star pupil of the Botvinnik chess school, Garry Weinstein, decided to change his *familiya* to that of his mother, Kasparov, after his father died. Botvinnik seemed to be offended that his protégé was adopting a more Russian, less Jewish surname. "I don't approve. I didn't change my father's *familiya* to my mother's," he said according to Olga. "I could have done it but didn't," he said, according to Taimanov. "I didn't do that. It showed character!" he said "proudly," according to Karpov. "And what was your mother's *familiya,* Mikhail Moiseyevich?" he was asked. Botvinnik smiled and said "Rabinovich."

157th School

By Autumn 1923 Botvinnik had begun playing in school tournaments and scored about 50 percent in his first. "I only remember that we played after classes in the school cafeteria.... Despite all effort, opponents often defeated me: They had greater experience and knowledge," he wrote in his three-volume game collection. The first chess book Botvinnik devoured was a bound volume of *Shakhmatny Listok* for 1876-77, which he received as a gift in October 1923. "I knew it by heart," he later claimed. He also read all the newspaper chess columns in St. Petersburg (renamed Leningrad in 1924). And as soon as a new textbook by the well known authors Nikolai Grekov and Vladimir Nenarokov came out, "I quickly bought it." But he also discovered the limits of book knowledge. "I remember how as soon as I learned the Ruy Lopez I immediately played it against Milyutin. However, at some moment he (chuckling at me) avoided the variation given by Grekov and Nenarokov and ... quickly I lost!"

Misha also played in a simultaneous exhibition given by Emanuel Lasker, when the former world champion visited Leningrad in February 1924. Lasker "played strongly, but slowly" and the boy had to abandon the game after 15 moves because 12-year-olds had to be home by then.

One of his first published games, from a school tournament that began on March 22, 1924, shows he had developed a clinical positional style.

157th School championship, Leningrad 1924
Botvinnik–A. Zilberman
D53 Queen's Gambit Declined

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bg5 Nbd7 5. e3 Be7 6. Nf3 h6 7. B×f6

Databases, which may not be trustworthy before 1924, indicate this game is the oldest surviving example of 7. B×f6. It was later played by grandmasters, with the idea of 7. ... N×f6 8. c5!?.

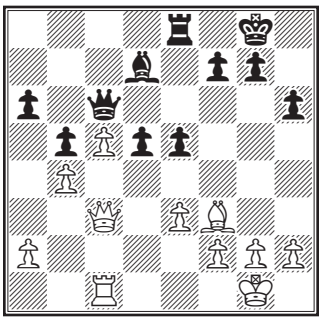
7. ... N×f6 8. Bd3?! Bd6? 9. Qb3

White could punish Black's last move with 9. c5! Be7 10. 0–0 and Ne5. As the game goes, 11. e4! would also have gained an edge.

9. ... c6 10. 0–0 Qc7 11. c×d5 c×d5? 12. Nb5 Qb8 13. N×d6+ Q×d6 14. Rac1 0–0 15. Ne5 Nd7 16. N×d7

This is simple, classical chess: White enjoys the better bishop and control of the only open file. Botvinnik said that the most important book to him growing up was a Russian translation of José Capablanca's *Chess Fundamentals* and his play in this game shows Capa-like tendencies.

16. ... Q×d7 17. Bb5 Qd6 18. Rc2 a6 19. Be2 b5 20. Rfc1 Bd7 21. Rc5! Rac8 22. Qa3 R×c5 23. d×c5 Qc6 24. b4 e5 25. Qc3 Re8 26. Bf3 *(diagram)*



After 26. Bf3

It's unusual for a player so young to try to provoke 26. ... e4, which makes the bad bishop worse, or to insist on trading queens, when there might be easier ways to win.

26. ... e4 27. Be2 Ra8 28. Ra1! Qg6 29. Qe5 Bh3 30. Qg3?! Q×g3 31. h×g3 Bd7 32. Bd1 Rc8? 33. a4 a5?

Black missed chances to make a fight of it (32. ... a5!) and his last move was a blunder punishable by 34. a×b5 B×b5 35. R×a5 or 34. ... a×b4 34. c6!.

34. b×a5? R×c5 35. a×b5 R×b5? 36. a6 Rb8 37. a7 Ra8 38. Ra5 Bc6 39. Kf1 Kf8 40. Ke2

The king will get to d4 or c5, where it dooms the d5-pawn. Black could have put up much better resistance with 35. ... B×b5! in view of 36. a6? B×a6! 37. R×a6 Rc1.

40. ... Ke7 41. Kd2 Kd6 42. Kc3 Kc7 43. Kd4 Kb6 44. Ra2 R×a7 45. R×a7 K×a7 46. Bb3 Kb6 47. B×d5 B×d5 48. K×d5 1–0

Botvinnik's most ambitious memoir was *Analiticheskiye i Kriticheskiye Raboty (Analytical and Critical Works),* hereafter referred to as *Analytical*. The part in it devoted to his early games was more or less lifted from an article he wrote for the June 1949 issue of

Shakhmaty v SSSR, by then the leading Soviet chess magazine. But in *Analytical* he omitted the following flawed game. Botvinnik recalled that his opponent, having already graduated, didn't have time to come to the school to play in its championship. So Misha went to Abramovich's home and asked to play a tournament game there. Here are some of his original notes.

157th School championship, Leningrad 1924
Grisha Abramovich–Botvinnik
E61 King's Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. Nf3 d6 5. Bf4 Nh5 6. Qd2?! N×f4 7. Q×f4 Nd7 8. Ng5

Abramovich had beaten him in the previous year "and only wanted to win the game a bit faster," Botvinnik wrote. "White's idea is simple: Either Black overlooks mate on f7 or, after 8. ... f6 9. Ne6, loses a queen!"

8. ... 0–0 9. e3 h6

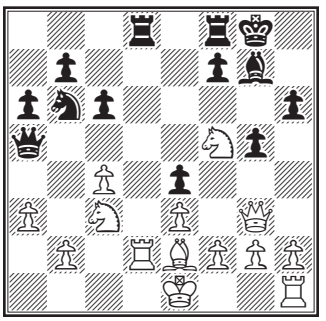
"Of course, better was 9. ... e5 immediately but then I couldn't resist proving to the opponent the futility of the knight maneuver to g5."

10. Nf3 e5 11. d×e5 d×e5 12. Qe4 Nb6 13. Nb5?! a6 14. Rd1 Qe7 15. Nc3 c6 16. Be2 Bf5 17. Qh4 Qb4

"The absence of the White queen from the queenside begins to tell."

18. Rd2 g5! 19. Qg3 e4?

"Letting slip all the advantage but how to resist such an 'active' move? Simple and clear was the continuation 19. ... Rad8 20. a3 Qb3." As Botvinnik matured he tended to avoid simplicity. But one of his favorite words was "clarity." If he could calculate a complex variation to the point of clarity, where there was no doubt about its evaluation, that was the ideal.



After 22. N×f5

20. Nd4 Rad8

"This move from the psychological side, in essence, decided the game," he said. White saw that 21. N×f5? R×d2 22. K×d2 Q×b2+ was lost, so:

21. a3 Qa5 22. N×f5?? *(diagram)*

Thanks to Black's error at move 19, he would be slightly worse after 22. h4! (Botvinnik only considered 22. 0–0 and Rfd1 in 1949). After 22. N×f5 White can hold after 22. ... B×c3 23. b×c3 R×d2 24. N×h6+! Kh7 25. Qh3! (Alexander Khalifman). But:

22. ... R×d2! 23. Ne7+ Kh7 24. K×d2 B×c3+

It would be a rout after 25. b×c3 Rd8+ 26. Kc2 Qa4+ or 25. Kc2 B×b2!.

25. Kc1 B×b2+! 26. K×b2 Qd2+ 27. Kb3 Q×e2

Black had alternate wins in 26. ... Na4+ and here with 27. ... Nd7!.

28. f4 Q×c4+ 29. Kb2 Na4+ 30. Kb1 Qd3+ 31. Kc1 Qc3+ 32. Kd1 Rd8+ 0–1

"My opponent was very upset," he wrote. "In the second game he was a bit more careful but the advantage was on my side all the time. However just as the struggle turned into an endgame—I lost immediately!"

Nevertheless Botvinnik won the 157th School championship and was mentioned in print, apparently for the first time, after winning another event, in issue number 19, 1924, of *Shakhmatny Listok,* the leading Russian chess magazine. His rapid rise didn't seem to surprise him, if you believe his remarkable comment in *Analytical:* "Evidently, if the ability exists, ten to 12 months is sufficient to master the rudiments of positional play."

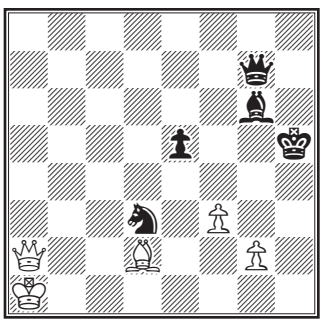
His new friend Abramovich had third-category ranking. That was above the lowest level, fourth category, but far below first category and master level. Abramovich was acquainted with the Petrograd Chess Assembly. He introduced Botvinnik to the club, which had quarters at Vladimirsky Prospekt, 12. In *Achieving the Aim*, Botvinnik said that the minimum age for members was 16 so "I had to add three years to my age." (Actually he was 12 at the time, so he needed four more years.)

Samuil Vainshtein, the balding, bespectacled chair of the club, as well as of the All-Russian Chess Union, "guessed my cunning trick, of course, but my spectacles gave me a solid appearance, and it all looked plausible." Historian Sergei Voronkov finds this dubious and suggests that Yakov Rokhlin, who became the first of Botvinnik's mentors, pulled strings to get him accepted. Adding to the confusion, Botvinnik wrote that he wasn't the only underage member. "Seryozha Kaminer was only slightly older," he said. But Kaminer was actually 15, three years older.

Sergei (Seryozha) Kaminer was the first close chess friend in Botvinnik's life. Kaminer, who later became an accomplished endgame composer, analyzed his studies with Botvinnik and beat him in a three-game training match in 1924. "I was so much weaker than Seryozha that I didn't even understand why I lost all three games," he recalled. Kaminer, who was bigger and more athletic, also taught Botvinnik how to box. Fortunately, he said, "he spared my nose and eyes." They also composed together:

White to play and win
Botvinnik and Kaminer (1925)

Solution: 1. g4+ Kh4 2. Bh6! Q×h6
3. Qh2+ Kg5 4. Qd2+ Nf4 5. Qd8 mate



But while Botvinnik appreciated studies his entire career, he developed the disdain that "practicians," as he described them, often had for composers. "When Seryozha played chess he was always looking for a study that was not there," he said. Botvinnik composed ten studies over his long career but all of them reflected ideas that arose in his games. "For me, composition was not an end in itself," he said. This reflected the Party's contempt for art-for-art's-sake, which later led to a crackdown on Soviet endgame composers whose studies weren't "practical."

On Vladimirsky Prospekt

On June 1, 1924, Botvinnik joined the Assembly, to his parents' dismay. "My parents were categorically against me playing chess. I remember walking with my father along Vladimirsky Prospekt past the gambling club, where on the top floor the Petrograd Chess Assembly occupied two rooms, and saying to him 'Daddy, look, that's where I play.'" His father feared he would be tempted by the gambling. "But it didn't interest me at all," he wrote. "I was aiming for the top floor." Meanwhile, his mother "secretly complained to the director of the school about my fascination. He said, 'Your son is a bookworm, leave him in peace,'" Botvinnik wrote. She eventually paid for his dues to the Assembly and for his first tournament entry fee.

Botvinnik's devotion to chess came providentially during the first chess boom of Leningrad. In 1923 there were only 2,000 to 3,000 organized players in the entire country. But by July 1925 there were more than 7,000 in Leningrad alone, according to Yuri Averbakh. Soon they included the future masters Vladimir Alatortsev, Vyacheslav Ragozin, Georgy Lisitsyn, Vitaly Chekhover, and Grigory Ravinsky. Rokhlin, who would play an enormous role in Botvinnik's life, managed to open a club in February 1925 that became the center of activity after the Assembly was closed.

But Botvinnik remained something of a loner. "I didn't have a trainer. I learned everything myself, and I analyzed a lot myself. At that time everyone in Leningrad was a pupil of Romanovsky but I did not go to that club, for which Romanovsky took a dislike to me." Pyotr Romanovsky, 19 years older than Botvinnik, was a man of many talents. He was a poet and acquaintance of the Russian symbolist Alexander Blok. He was an accomplished musician, specializing in the balalaika and harmonica. Romanovsky had devoted his life to chess, and his prize pupils included some of Botvinnik's later rivals, such as Alatortsev. He held court at his club at Fontanka Embankment, 48, not far from where Botvinnik lived.

But it was too far for a person of "hard character." Instead Botvinnik played at a metal workers club much farther from home. Romanovsky, in turn, didn't think much of the 13-year-old. "He combines weakly, plays boringly and waits for opponents' mistakes," he said. This was unfair. But Botvinnik's tactical skill did need work:

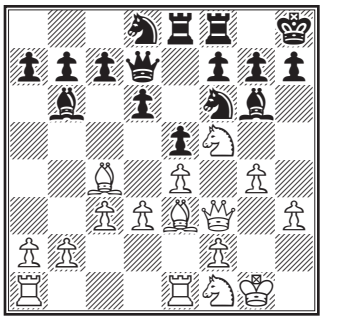
Tournament of second and third category players, Leningrad 1924
Botvinnik–I. Kalinin
C55 Giuoco Piano

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. 0–0 Bc5 5. d3 d6 6. Be3 Bb6 7. Nbd2 0–0 8. c3 Bg4 9. h3 Bh5 10. Re1 Qe7 11. g4! Bg6 12. Nh4 Kh8 13. Nf5

White's enterprising play is designed to put pressure on the Black center after 13. ... B×f5 14. e×f5 d5 15. Bb5 and Bg5.

13. ... Qd7 14. Qf3 Rae8 15. Nf1 Nd8 *(diagram)*

Mastering combinational play begins with recognizing recurring patterns. Botvinnik fails to see a combination that had been played in similar form many times before, 16. N×g7! K×g7 17. Bh6+!. Then, 17. ... K×h6 18. Q×f6 threatens 19. Ng3 and 20. g5 mate and leads to 18. ... Qe7 19. g5+ Kh5 20. Ng3+ Kh4 21. Nf5+ B×f5 22. Qh6 mate. Or 18. ... Re6 19. B×e6 Q×e6 20. g5+ Kh5 21. Qg7! and wins.



After 15. ... Nd8

16. h4? B×e3 17. f×e3? Ne6?

Now it was Black's turn to overlook the strong 17. ... d5! (18. e×d5 e4!).

18. N1g3 Nc5 19. g5 Ng8 20. h5 B×f5 21. N×f5 Qd8 22. Kf2!? Ne7 23. h6 g6?!

Black missed chances for advantage with 20. ... b5 or 21. ... b5 and now could have had the edge with 23. ... N×f5. But he had a clever idea.

24. Ng7 f5! 25. g×f6 d5 26. N×e8 d×c4! 27. f7

Now with 27. ... Ng8! Black would have the edge, e.g. 28. f×g8(Q)+ K×g8.

27. ... N×d3+? 28. Ke2 N×e1?? 29. Qf6 checkmate

In *Analytical,* Botvinnik recalls an incident in a tournament at the Chess Assembly with his main rival, "a deaf-and-dumb artist by the name of Folga." Folga, one of Botvinnik's first chess enemies, "clearly wished me ill, and in order to demonstrate this he would rub his hands with pleasure when I got into difficult positions." Botvinnik exacted revenge one round when Folga had a lost position and "I laid his king down on the board." Folga complained and "I was almost thrown out of the Assembly."

On the 100th anniversary of Alexander Alekhine's birth in 1992, Botvinnik wrote that "the chess life of Russia was weakly organized" when Alekhine began so he had to play correspondence chess. These games forced Alekhine to become an analyst and a "researcher," a favorite term of Botvinnik approval. There is no evidence that Botvinnik played postal chess. But he did his own analysis in pencil in notebooks and had recorded as many of Lasker's simultaneous exhibition games as he could, along with his own comments, early in 1924.

Botvinnik Versus Capablanca

During the "First Moscow International" of 1925 Nikolai Grigoriev, a prominent endgame composer and chess apparatchik, urged Rokhlin to persuade José Capablanca to give a simultaneous exhibition in St. Petersburg. The world champion was attracted by the large honorarium offered. And there is "another version" of Capa's interest in the trip, according to Yuri Averbakh: Rokhlin knew of a beautiful girl Capablanca had been enamored of when he was a Cuban diplomat in St. Petersburg in 1913 and promised to arrange a rendezvous with her if he agreed to the simul.

Rokhlin, conversing in German and French, told Capablanca that arrangements would be made to take him on the "Red Arrow" sleeper train that left Moscow around 11 P.M. and arrived in Leningrad nine hours later. Capa insisted on his own compartment. "I don't like neighbors," he said. No problem, Rokhlin replied. He would buy him both tickets in a two-person compartment.

When the date of the exhibition was set, Rokhlin phoned Nevsky, 88. "Tomorrow you are to play against Capablanca in a simultaneous," he began. "Do you have any special request?"

"Could I have a pass to the exhibition for my brother?" Misha replied.

"For your brother? Possibly for someone else as well? Maybe you need several passes?"

"Yes, if possible," was the response.

"Out of the question. Be satisfied you are playing."

On the morning of November 20, Capablanca arrived in Leningrad, checked into the Hotel European for a rest and then appeared at 3 P.M. for the simul at the Small Hall of the Philharmonic, at Mikhailovskaya Street, 2. The site, now named after composer Dmitry Shostakovich, was the scene of another important event in Botvinnik's career, the 1934 "Tournament with the participation of Euwe and Kmoch." Botvinnik was the youngest of the 30 simul players. In *Analytical,* he recalled his mother's earlier disdain for chess. "Who do you want to become — Capablanca?" she asked. But when she learned he was actually going to play the world champion "she bought me a brand-new brown shirt."

Several leading artists, actors and writers turned out to watch the simul. The atmosphere was heavy, like in a Russian bathhouse, Botvinnik recalled. He found two second-category players were sitting on one chair at the board reserved for him. Without embarrassment, they invited Botvinnik to join them at his board. The exhibition began and Capablanca quickly made a diplomatic draw with the only woman playing, Irina Tikhomirova. He concentrated on the other games.

Simultaneous exhibition, Leningrad 1925
José Capablanca–Botvinnik
D51 Queen's Gambit Declined

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bg5 Nbd7 5. e3 Bb4 6. c×d5 e×d5

Earlier that year Botvinnik defended a Queen's Gambit with the only variation he knew, from a recently translated book by Siegbert Tarrasch. The analysis ran 18 moves

but his "first independent move was a mistake!" he said, and he won only by outplaying his opponent tactically. By the time of the exhibition, however, he had enlarged his repertoire.

7 Qb3?! c5!

Capablanca, who expected Black to adopt a ... c6 pawn structure, was caught off guard and should have continued 8. Nf3.

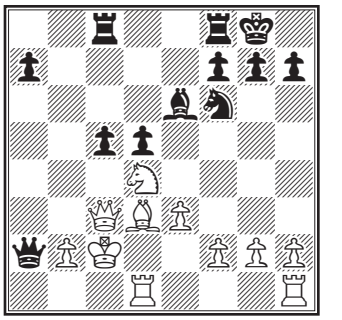
8. d×c5?! Qa5 9. B×f6 N×f6 10. 0–0–0?

Botvinnik said that when the game began, Capablanca probably didn't know who he was playing—because from the other side of the board, where he and his two companions sat, one hand would emerge to make a move whenever the Cuban arrived at their table. However, by now "Capablanca saw that he was playing a boy, and decided to take a risk."

10. ... 0–0 11. Nf3 Be6 12. Nd4 Rac8 13. c6!? B×c3!

White tried to close the c-file (13. ... b×c6). As in Botvinnik's celebrated crush of Paul Keres 16 years later, an unprovoked ... B×c3 is surprisingly strong. White could resign after 14. b×c3 Ne4.

14. Q×c3 Q×a2 15. Bd3 b×c6 16. Kc2 c5 *(diagram)*



After 16. ... c5

"My companions bombarded me with suggestions but even at the age of 14 I had a firm character. I played my own game," and covered his ears with his hands, he said. To avoid 17. Ra1 c×d4, White seeks a better trade of queens, 17. N×e6 f×e6? 18. Ra1 and 18. ... d4 19. R×a2 d×c3 20. Bc4!.

17. N×e6 Qa4+! 18. b3 Qa2+ 19. Qb2 Q×b2+ 20. K×b2 f×e6 21. f3 Rc7 22. Ra1 c4 23. b×c4 d×c4 24. Bc2 Rb8+ 25. Kc1 Nd5 26. Re1 c3 27. Ra3 Nb4 28. Re2 Rd8 29. e4 Rc6!

White's last trap was 29. ... Rd2?? 30. R×c3!. Now that Black's rook is protected, 30. ... Rd2 will win.

30. Re3 Rd2 31. Ra×c3 R×c2+ 32. R×c2 R×c2+ 0–1

In *Half a Century of Chess,* another of his game collections, Botvinnik wrote: "Capablanca overturned his king ... with a look of dissatisfaction on his face. That is why I doubt the eyewitness reports alleging that Capablanca praised my skill." He altered this slightly in *Analytical*, saying Capa "swept away the pieces (as a sign that he had resigned)."

Rokhlin embellished the story. He created "the legend that, having lost this game, Capablanca tapped the winner on the shoulder and predicted a brilliant future for him," according to Averbakh. Rokhlin also claimed that after the simul ended, with a score of 18 wins, 8 draws and 4 losses in his favor, Capa was waiting at the Moscow Station for

his train. "Who was that dark-haired boy who systematically defeated me in the rook endgame?" he asked Rokhlin. "Señor, it was Misha Botvinnik. He's 14 and already a second-category player," Rokhlin said he replied. "Second-category? You're joking? In Cuba he could receive the master level. I think that he awaits a great future." The train whistle blew and Capa had to board.

This, too, seems embellished, and not just because Botvinnik was already a first-category player. Nevertheless, when he went to school the next morning he was treated liked a conquering hero. The game was printed in *Izvestia,* the newspaper of record in the Soviet Union, with notes by Nikolai Grigoriev. And Rokhlin, the most powerful chess organizer in Leningrad, now had a star to promote. "From that point Rokhlin became the guardian of the young player," supporting him in every way, Averbakh wrote.

Botvinnik had other interests, of course. At his mother's urging he attended a music school. But he was more attracted to photography and theater. On his school's graduation evening in 1927, he played the title role in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest.* "But without any great success," he wrote. "The role was too serious for me."

Many, if not most, of his serious games played during 1924–1926, are missing. His three-volume collection refers, for example, to "a heavy defeat in 16 moves from Levenfish." The earliest game with his great rival Grigory Levenfish that is mentioned in Alexander Khalifman's massive collection of Botvinnik games is a 1930 encounter, whose moves are lost. Yet we know that in 1926 Botvinnik made another leap in strength. He gave his first simul at the Park Ekaterinhof in southwest St. Petersburg and scored an impressive 12 wins and a draw in the semifinals of the Leningrad Championship.

Botvinnik had gone from beginner in 1923 to third-category status in 1924, first-category in 1925 and the equivalent of strong master in 1926. In the age of Elo, one might compare that with Hikaru Nakamura, whose first rating, in January 1995, was 684, rose to 1811 by the end of 1996 and reached master level in mid–1998.

Leningrad Championship Semifinals 1926
A. Zaslavsky–Botvinnik
D52 Queen's Gambit Declined

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6 3. c4 d5 4. Nc3 Nbd7 5. Bg5 c6 6. e3 Qa5 7. Nd2 Bb4 8. Qc2 0–0 9. Nb3 B×c3+!

The Cambridge Springs Defense was still relatively young and 9. Nb3 may have been played for the first time in this game. Black's reply is more accurate than 9. ... Qa4, which would allow 10. B×f6! N×f6 11. a3 B×c3+ 12. Q×c3! with a slight White edge. The difference is that 9. Nb3 B×c3+ 10. Q×c3 Q×c3+ 11. b×c3 can be met by 11. ... Ne4.

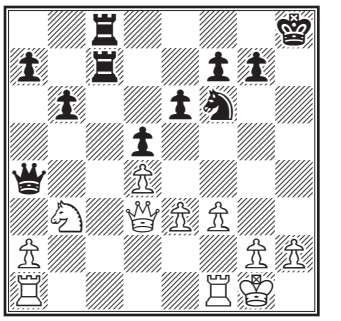
10. b×c3 Qa4 11. c×d5 c×d5 12. Bd3 b6 13. Qe2

Endgames favor Black because of the weakness at c3 (13. Nd2 Q×c2 14. B×c2 Ba6 and ... Rfc8).

13. ... Ne4! 14. Be7?

White had to play 14. B×e4 d×e4 although Black has the initiative after, say, 15. f3 Ba6 16. Qd2 f6! 17. Bf4 e×f3 18. g×f3 e5.

14. ... N×c3! 15. Qc2 Re8 16. B×h7+ Kh8 17. Bd3 R×e7 18. Q×c3 Ba6 19. 0–0 Rc8 20. Qd2 B×d3 21. Q×d3 Nf6 22. f3 Rec7 *(diagram)*



After 22. ... Rec7

Black's queenside majority and better pieces give him a clear positional edge, e.g. 23. Rfc1 Rc4! 24. Qd2 Qa3 25. Rab1 a5 and ... a4.

23. Rf2? Rc3 24. Qf1

Black wins a pawn, in view of 24. Qd2 R×b3.

24. ... R×e3 25. Re1 R×e1 26. Q×e1 Qc4 27. Rd2 a5! 28. Rd1 a4

After one of his early games, Botvinnik said his opponent predicted he would give up chess in "a few months" because he spent "too much energy during a game." However, this game shows an almost effortless winning technique. Here 30. Nc1 Qc2 is lost.

29. Rc1 a×b3! 30. R×c4 d×c4 0–1 The b-pawn can't be stopped.

During the USSR–Rest of the World match in 1970, the players were asked which game of their careers was the "best." Bobby Fischer cited his "Game of the Century" with Donald Byrne. Tigran Petrosian cited two of his world championship games. Botvinnik answered differently, saying there were many games he played that could be considered "the most important." He mentioned only one, a rook endgame he won from Mikhail Shebarshin in this tournament that enabled him to overtake his opponent for first place. Still, his good friend Seryozha Kaminer was unimpressed. "Why did they all lose to you?" he asked Misha about his result in the semifinals.

The finals were held at the former residence of Prince Semyon Abamelek-Lazarev, at Moika Embankment, 21. Like many of the great homes of the tsarist nobility it became a Soviet government office, the Home of Workers of Physical Culture. This turned out to be another lucky location for Botvinnik. It was where he won the 1932 Leningrad Championship and well as the 1933 and 1939 Soviet Championships.

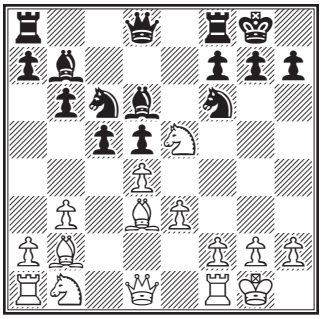
In 1926 he began the city championship finals with a draw, then five straight wins, including a victory over Rokhlin that he included in *Half a Century of Chess.* He also played the first of several games with an opponent who would help him reach the next level.

Leningrad Championship Finals 1926
Abram Model–Botvinnik
A06 Queen's Gambit Declined (by transposition)

1. Nf3 d5 2. b3 Nf6 3. Bb2 e6 4. e3 c5 5. d4

Abram Model was a convert to Aron Nimzowitsch's 1. Nf3 and 2. b3 opening but avoided Nimzo's Bb5 idea. He lost to Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky in this tournament in a

game that went 1. Nf3 d5 2. b3 c5 3. Bb2 Nc6 (3. ... f6!) 4. e3 Bg4 5. d4 (5. Bb5!) Nf6 6. Be2 e6 7. 0–0 Bd6 8. c4 0–0 9. a3 d×c4 10. b×c4 Qb6! 11. Nc3 B×f3 (11. ... Q×b2 12. Na4) 12. B×f3 c×d4 13. Nb5 Rfd8 14. a4 d×e3.



After 10. ... e×d5

5. ... Nc6 6. Bd3 Bd6 7. 0–0 0–0 8. c4 b6 9. Ne5 Bb7 10. c×d5 e×d5! *(diagram)*

"Once I asked, 'Mikhail Moiseyevich, why haven't you written a textbook?'" his nephew Igor Botvinnik recalled. "We will write one," he replied. "We'll finish the chess program and based on it we'll write." The computer program was never a success and the book never appeared. But an excerpt of Botvinnik's notes, signed and dated by him on August 4, 1992, revealed some of his thoughts: "The so-called hanging pawns ... as a rule do not give advantage to one side or the other."

Here Black invites hanging pawns after d×c5 and ... b×c5. Many, if not most, of his contemporaries, would have recaptured on d5 with pieces and obtained equality with a likely draw. Botvinnik rejected 10. ... N×d5 as well as the more complex, but also equal, 10. ... N×e5 11. d×e5 B×e5!? 12. B×e5 Q×d5 (threatening mate) and now 13. B×h7+ K×h7 14. Q×d5 N×d5.

11. Nd2 Qe7 12. Ndf3 Ne4 13. Rc1 Nb4 14. Bb1 f6 15. Nd3

At the cost of a little loosening of his pawn structure, Black has the more active pieces. But 15. ... Nc6? would allow White to create a favorable version of the hanging pawns with 16. d×c5! b×c5 17. Nf4.

15. ... N×d3 16. B×d3 Rfd8 17. Nh4 g6 18. Qe2 Rac8 19. Qg4 Qd7!

This looks like a pawn-losing blunder. "The clever tactician A. Model, apparently, counted on confusing the opponent," Botvinnik wrote.

20. Q×d7 R×d7 21. B×e4? d×e4 22. d×c5? B×c5! 23. B×f6 Rf8 24. Bg5 Rd5

This wins one of White's kingside pieces, e.g. 25. b4 B×b4 26. Rc7 allows 26. ... Rf7 27. R×f7 K×f7 28. f4! Ba6 29. Rc1 Bc5! (Khalifman).

25. Bh6 Rfd8 26. Kh1 g5 27. g3 g×h4 0–1

A loss to Ilya Rabinovich doomed Botvinnik's chances of winning the tournament but he finished in a highly respectable tie for second place, behind Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky. This name deserves our attention. Born Alexander Ilyin to a family of St. Petersburg nobility, he added "Genevsky" when he was exiled to Geneva because of his Marxist views. After returning to Russia, he suffered from poison gas and shell shock during World War I and had to learn how to play chess all over again. Ilyin-Genevsky also developed a nervous twitch according to Botvinnik: "He would rub his hands together very, very quickly with a swinging movement, while at the same time making a spitting

motion over his left shoulder." This had an adverse effect "on people who did not know him." He would play a crucial role in Botvinnik's life for the next ten years.

Meanwhile, Botvinnik was being praised by Rokhlin in *Shakhmatny Listok.* He claimed he didn't want the attention. "Thank God, earlier I had not been mentioned, and subsequently too I was not indulged with compliments," he said in *Analytical.* "A chess player is not an actor — he doesn't need praising!" And he continued to relate to the older St. Petersburg elite with disdain. "He made notes in his notebook, giving them pejorative characteristics. 'Old shoe' was the 'kindest' of them," Averbakh wrote.

But Botvinnik acquired a lifelong friend, Grigory Goldberg, through relatives. Three years older than he, "Grisha" was "tall, strong and long-legged" and was something he admired: Goldberg was more than a chess player. He was already a first-category player — in table tennis.

In August-September 1926 Botvinnik competed in the championship of the Soviet Union's North-West Region. His maturing play showed he was able to convert a positional edge through tactics.

North-West Region Championship Preliminaries, Leningrad 1926
K. Baryshev–Botvinnik
D52 Queen's Gambit Declined

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6 3. c4 d5 4. Nc3 Nbd7 5. Bg5 c6 6. e3 Qa5 7. c×d5 N×d5 8. Qd2 Bb4 9. Rc1 c5 10. Bd3 c×d4 11. e×d4 h6 12. Bh4 0–0 13. 0–0 b6

Databases indicate 8. Qd2 was born in this game, in place of 8. Qb3. White now tries to exploit the diagonal slightly weakened by ... h6.

14. Bb1 Ba6 15. Qc2 f5?! 16. N×d5?

White should have a slight edge after 16. Rfe1 and 17. Nd2 and then Nb3.

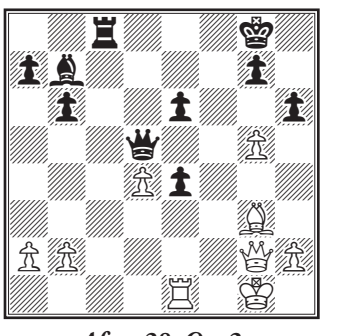
16. ... Q×d5 17. Rfd1 Bd6 18. Qd2 Rac8 19. R×c8 R×c8 20. Bg3 Be7!

His bishop heads for f6 to attack d4, and 21. Rc1 R×c1+ 22. Q×c1 Bf6 would give him a slim but solid edge (23. Qe3 g5!).

21. Ne5 Bg5! 22. f4? N×e5!

The point. Now 25. d×e5 loses to 25. ... Q×d2 26. R×d2 Rc1+.

23. f×g5 Nc4 24. Qf4? Bb7 25. Qf2 Ne3! 26. Re1 N×g2 27. Be4!? f×e4 28. Q×g2 *(diagram)*



After 28. Q×g2

"It's curious that 18 years later a similar situation was created in my game with Kotov in the 13th Championship of the USSR," he wrote.

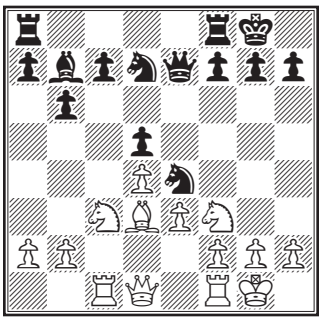
28. ... Rc2! 29. Q×c2 e3 30. Kf1 Qh1+ 31. Ke2 Qf3+ 32. Kd3 Be4+ 0–1

Stockholm

Games like that cemented Botvinnik's status, even at 15, as one of the strongest players in the city. He was selected to join a Leningrad team that went to Stockholm for a two-round match on November 6–7, 1926, the ninth anniversary of the Revolution. His mother was apprehensive when Rokhlin broke the news to her. She rushed off again to see the headmaster of the 157th School. But he said, "To see the world at such an age it is in order to miss school for ten days." His father, still in contact with the family, gave Misha spending money and he bought a suit, a Borsalino hat and horn-rimmed glasses.

Leningrad–Stockholm match
Stockholm 1926
Botvinnik–Gösta Stoltz
D55 Queen's Gambit Declined

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bg5 Be7 5. e3 0–0 6. Nf3 b6 7. Rc1 Bb7 8. Bd3 Nbd7 9. 0–0 Ne4



After 11. ... e×d5

Stoltz played only fifth board but would soon become his country's best player, winning matches from Isaac Kashdan, Salo Flohr and Rudolf Spielmann during 1930 and 1931.

10. B×e7 Q×e7 11. c×d5 e×d5 *(diagram)*

In the few previous, recorded instances of this position, White got nothing from 12. Ne2 c5, 12. Qb3 c6 or 12. B×e4 d×e4 13. Nd2 c5.

12. N×e4? d×e4 13. R×c7 Bc8!

White thought he would win, after 13. ... Rab8 or 13. ... Bd5, with 14. Ne5. After being surprised by 13. ... Bc8, he can try for equality with 14. Be2 e×f3 15. B×f3 Rb8 16. R×a7 or 14. ... Qd6 15. Qc2 e×f3 16. B×f3 Rb8 17. R×a7.

14. Bb5?! e×f3?

Instead of winning a piece with unclear chances, Black should insert 14. ... Qd8! (15. R×c8 R×c8 or 15. Rc3 e×f3 16. Q×f3 Rb8 17. Rfc1 Nf6).

15. Q×f3 Qd6?? 16. Qc6!

White is winning (16. ... Q×c6 17. B×c6 Rb8 18. B×d7).

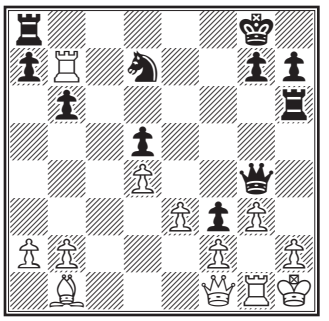
16. ... Qb4 17. Q×a8 Ba6 18. Q×f8+! N×f8 19. B×a6 h5 20. R×a7 Q×b2 21. Bc4 Ne6 22. Bb3 h4 23. d5 Nd8 24. Rd7! Qf6 25. h3 b5 26. e4 Kh7 27. e5 Qb6 28. Re1 b4 29. e6 f×e6 30. d×e6 N×e6 31. R×e6 1–0

After the match, the president of the Swedish Chess Association, Ludvig Collijn,

gave each member of the Leningrad team a copy of the Queen's Gambit book that bore Collijn's name but was really written by Akiba Rubinstein, Richard Réti and Rudolf Spielmann. "This book meant a lot to me," Botvinnik said.

The Stoltz game was mediocre at best. But a win over a foreign master was rare and so it was published in *Izvestia* on December 1, 1926, with notes of praise by Grigoriev. Samuil Vainshtein, who ran *Shakhmatny Listok*, got Botvinnik to write his own notes for the magazine. This is how his writing career began. Within two years he was recognized as an accomplished analyst who contributed to a book on the Alekhine–Capablanca world championship match. "Even Bogolyubov didn't analyze so," Vainshtein said.

But the notes to this game that appeared in his first game collections are flawed. Botvinnik gave an alternative to 12. N×e4, a long variation that began 12. Bb1 f5 13. N×e4, with the idea of 14. R×c7. He continued with 13. ... f×e4 14. R×c7 e×f3 15. R×b7 but said this failed because of 15. ... Qg5 16. g3 Qg4 17. Kh1 Rf6 18. Rg1 Rh6 19. Qf1 *(diagram)*.



Botvinnik–Stoltz (analysis)
After 19. Qf1

Botvinnik ended his analysis with the comment that 19. ... Rh3 followed by ... Qh5 wins for Black. But there are two errors. First, White can turn the tables with 20. Bf5! Q×f5 21. g4. Second, instead of 19. ... Rh3 Black can win immediately with 19. ... Qh5 since 20. h4 is met by 21. ... Q×h4+!. He later amended his notes, saying 17. Qd3! would safely defend.

Many years later one of Botvinnik's prized students, Anna Akhsharumova, and her husband Boris Gulko applied for exit visas from the Soviet Union to begin a new life abroad. Botvinnik told them that he could have left the USSR too, by defecting in Stockholm. But, he said, "I didn't and it did not turn out bad." Gulko's version is slightly different but he said Botvinnik's comment showed that "apparently his whole life he had been haunted by the question of whether he had done the right thing by returning to Leningrad." But, Gulko added, "Imbued with a consciousness of his own greatness, Botvinnik considered his life exemplary." Therefore, he must have made the right decision.

Botvinnik was at a different kind of crossroads when he considered a profession. He made a deliberate choice not to pursue a chess-only career. "I considered it obligatory for me to have some other work, just like everyone else," he wrote in *Achieving the Aim.* "I didn't want to be different." His later friend Viktor Malkin said Moisei Botvinnik played a role, having told his son since boyhood that he needed a solid profession.

Misha set his sights on becoming an electrical engineer. It had the social prestige

that a physicist enjoyed in the middle of the 20th century. And it also had political cachet:

There had been distinct strands of Communist thinking for decades. "Romantic" Communism had faith in the people joyously working together to forge a new, classless society. "Radical" Communism, on the other hand, took the harder line that the people should focus on creating the new society by destroying the bourgeoisie. Botvinnik appears to have been a follower of another strand, "Technocratic" Communism. In this view, the people will wipe out inequality and poverty by industrializing the economy with the help of modern tools and central planning. This view emphasized the patriotic need for engineers and scientists.

The same spirit still existed to a degree in the 1950s when Alexander Nikitin was a worthy junior rival of Boris Spassky, Mikhail Tal and Lev Polugaevsky. "They went into the humanities higher education institutions but I decided it was necessary to help the Motherland," Nikitin reflected in 2003. He entered a "very difficult radio department" and became a radio engineer. That set his chess career back, while Tal and Spassky studied journalism and had more time for chess.

In 1927 Misha Botvinnik graduated from the 157th School. But at age 16 he was a year too young to try to enter the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute, his goal. This recalls Paul Morphy, who earned his law degree at 20 but couldn't practice until he was 21. While Morphy waited he entered his first tournament, the First American Chess Congress of 1857. Botvinnik recognized the mixed blessing. "I had to reconcile myself to the idea of losing a whole school year," he wrote in an early game collection, "but on the other hand, having more time for chess!"

2. Allies and Enemies

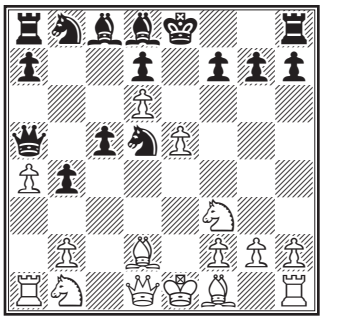
By age 16 Mikhail Botvinnik's moves were becoming known to a national audience, thanks to a small group of older, devoted supporters. On one occasion, those moves were improved. In 1927 he won three games from his mentor, Yakov Rokhlin. In the third game Rokhlin could have resigned after just 13 moves. But readers of *Pravda* were shown a doctored version of the game.

"Tournament of Six Players," Leningrad 1927
Botvinnik–Yakov Rokhlin
E10 Irregular Benoni

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 c5 4. d5 e×d5 5. c×d5 b5 6. a4 Qa5+ 7. Bd2 b4 8. e4! Be7?

"My partner lost his head. But in case of 8. ... d6 9. Na3 Qd8 10. Bb5+ Bd7 11. Nc4 White's advantage is evident," Botvinnik wrote.

9. d6! Bd8 10. e5 Nd5? *(diagram)*



After 10. ... Nd5

Here White played 11. Bg5!. "This not-obvious move forces Black to give back a pawn. Bad is 11. ... B×g5 because of 12. Q×d5 or 11. ... Bb7 in view of 12. Bc4," Botvinnik wrote. He went on to win, without incident, in 17 more moves, beginning with 11. ... b3+ 12. Bd2 Nb4 13. Q×b3. But, as Botvinnik put it, "this game is connected with a curious history."

Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky, who was editing the chess column in *Pravda,* heard about the game and called Rokhlin, an old friend, for the moves. "He at first refused point blank, saying that the game was completely uninteresting," Botvinnik wrote. "But Ilyin-Genevsky continued to insist." Finally, Rokhlin gave in and, as a joke, dictated over the phone the following moves, which appeared with Ilyin-Genevsky's notes in the September 4, 1927, issue of the newspaper with the largest circulation in the country:

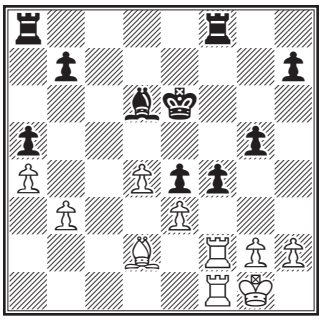
11. Na3 Ba6 12. Bb5! B×b5 13. a×b5 0–0 14. 0–0 Qb6 15. Qa4! b×a3 16. R×a3 g6 17. Ng5 h6 18. Ne4 Kh7 19. Rh3 h5 20. g4 h4 21. Bg5 Kg7 22. R×h4 Rh8 23. Bf6+ B×f6 24. e×f6+ Kg8 25. R×h8+ K×h8 26. g5 Nc6 27. N×c5! 1–0

Black is apparently mated by 28. Qh4+. It's impressive that Rokhlin could create this "fantasy game," as Botvinnik put it. However, it's flawed. Black should not resign because 27. ... Ncb4 28. Qb3 Q×d6 would allow him to recover (29. Qh3+ Kg8 30. N×d7 Qf4).

The real game was played in an elite double-round tournament of six of the best Leningrad players. Play was conducted at the leisurely pace of two rounds a week for five summer weeks. Botvinnik spent the rest of the time enjoying the beach at a *dacha*, or summer home, at Sestoretsk, northwest of the city. "My shoulders turned bluish-black," he claimed in *Achieving the Aim,* and he attributed his good showing to fresh air, a clear head and excellent physical conditioning. "Then you can really play chess!"

Botvinnik felt that if he won the "Tournament of Six Players" there would be no reason to deny him an invitation to the Soviet Championship, which was scheduled for fall 1927 after a two-year lapse. His chief rival for the spot was Pyotr Romanovsky. "Romanovsky's attitude to me, just as was the case with the whole of the older generation, was one of jealousy, and no particular good will," he wrote. "Before my appearance Romanovsky and his contemporaries held undisputed sway, and then suddenly this 'upstart' appeared!"

But Botvinnik also had allies, such as Abram Model, 31. A multi-talented mathematics teacher who wrote poetry as well as epigrams for Soviet chess magazines, Model took Botvinnik under his wing. He lived at Nevsky Prospekt, 65, not far away from Botvinnik's number 88. He had great patience and would say "Mishel, don't hurry," when Botvinnik tried to demonstrate some allegedly forced multi-move variation. "Soon he found a hole in my analysis at the second move," Botvinnik recalled. "From Model I learned the art of analysis!" *(diagram)*



Model–Botvinnik,
"Tournament of Six Players,"
Leningrad 1927
After 34. Rcf1

Black has the advantage but it wouldn't be enough to win after 34. ... f×e3 35. B×e3 R×f2 36. R×f2 g4 37. Rc2. Botvinnik sacrifices a pawn.

34. ... Kd5! 35. e×f4 g×f4 36. B×f4 B×f4 37. R×f4 R×f4 38. R×f4 K×d4 39. Rf7 Ke3! 40. R×h7 Rd8

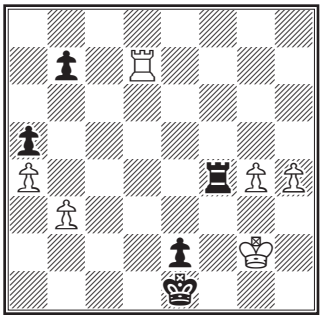
Black threatens mate and paves the way for ... Kd2 and ... e3–e2.

41. g4 Kd2 42. Re7 e3 43. Kf1 Rf8+ 44. Kg2 e2 45. Rd7+ Ke1

White appears fated to give up his rook for the e-pawn. The game's outcome would then rest on a battle between the Black rook and White's two kingside pawns and king. Black would win after 46. g5 Rf2+ 47. Kg3 Kf1 48. Re7 Rg2+!, according to Botvinnik.

But Alexander Khalifman found a draw: 46. Rd5! Rf2+ 47. Kg1! Rf3 48. g5 R×b3 49. Kg2 Rb4 50. h3 R×a4 51. g6 Re4 52. g7 Re8 53. R×a5 Rg8 54. Ra1+ and Black must cede the e-pawn or accept perpetual check.

46. h4? Rf4! *(diagram)*



After 46. ... Rf4

It won't be K&Ps–vs.–K&R after all. Black is close to a win, e.g. 47. Kg3 Re4 48. Kf3 Kf1!.

47. Re7 R×g4+ 48. Kf3 R×h4 49. R×e2+ Kd1 50. Re5?

White could have drawn by confining the Black king and threatening mate, 50. Rg2!! Rh3+ 51. Ke4 R×b3 52. Kd4 Rb4+ 53. Kd3! and 53. ... Kc1 54. Kc3 Kb1 55. Rh2! R×a4 56. Rh1+ Ka2 57. Rh2+ Ka3 58. Rh1!. After the text, Black wins the b-pawn and his superior king position decides the game, e.g. 50. ... b6! 51. Rb5 Rb4!.

50. ... b6! 51. Re6 Rb4 52. Rc6 Kd2! 53. Kf2 R×b3 54. Kf1 Rb4 55. Kf2 Kd3 56. Ke1 Kd4 57. Kd2 Kd5 58. Rh6 Kc5 59. Rh5+ Kc4 0–1

In the end Romanovsky outplayed Botvinnik and finished first, a point and a half ahead of him. That set the stage for the kind of last-minute intrigue that became a frequent feature of Soviet championships.

Enter Krylenko

The 5th Championship was scheduled to begin September 26, 11 days after a plenum of the chess section of Sports Committee, the governing body of Soviet chess and checkers. The meeting was chaired by Nikolai Vasilyevich Krylenko, a short, bald, imposing figure, always dressed in semimilitary jacket and boots. He was an Old Bolshevik and his Party credentials included playing chess with Lenin, Mikhail Frunze, Mikhail Kalinin, Valerian Kuibyshev and other luminaries. His day job was that of state prosecutor. He sent hundreds of men to jail, or worse, for political crimes. But in his spare time he ruled Soviet chess for 13 years. "Chessplayers both feared and loved Krylenko," Botvinnik wrote of the man who became the most powerful, if somewhat reluctant, promoter of his career.

During the plenum Rokhlin made a pitch for Botvinnik, who was fifth on the waiting list for invitations to the championship. Botvinnik's inclusion was not only deserved but "a matter of the prestige of Leningrad, the leading chess center of the country," he argued. But there was vigorous opposition. "Then I decided on a desperate step," Rokhlin recalled. "I said I refused to take part in the championship in order that Botvinnik would take my place." Rokhlin had earned an invitation to the championship because he had just drawn a match with Ilyin-Genevsky and obtained the then-rare title of master.

But Nikolai Grigoriev and Vasily Russo, a strong checker player who had emerged as a power in the chess section, objected: The sudden vacancy should go to Nikolai Rudnev, not Botvinnik, they said. Rudnev was a professional musician who had earned the master title the pre–Revolution way, by going to Europe and winning a section of the ill-fated German Chess Congress at Mannheim 1914. He had been living in remote Samarkand, had won a Central Asian tournament and was more deserving than a big-city, first-category kid who had just turned 16, Russo argued.

This triggered a long debate. But only one other participant — Alexey Alekhine, brother of the self-exiled world championship aspirant — supported Rokhlin. As the meeting ended and Rokhlin sat disconsolately in his chair, Krylenko approached him and said, "There's no reason to despair." Botvinnik would get his invitation, too. Botvinnik made no mention in his memoirs of how he got into the most important event in his career up till then. In *Half a Century of Chess,* he said it occurred "quite by accident.... Fortunately some players declined to participate."

Born in the Hotel Liverpool

During the tournament, Botvinnik shared a room with Model at Moscow's Hotel Liverpool (later the Centralnaya). In the first round they were paired and Botvinnik got an education. As White he met 1. d4 e6 with 2. e4 and struggled through a Winawer Variation of the French Defense and lost.

Sixteen-year-old Mikhail Botvinnik, about the time he played in his first Soviet championship, at Moscow in 1927.

After the game Model "took the time to pass his experience on to me in a generous spirit because he wanted to help me become a master," Botvinnik wrote. "Together we analyzed games, prepared openings. Model knew opening theory weakly, preferring to play 'non-theoretical' openings. But he taught me to play the French and Dutch!" he wrote. In one of his last articles Botvinnik said his celebrated method of preparation "was not thought up in the quiet of a study. It was born in the fire of tournament struggle" in "one room of the Hotel Liverpool."

The earliest surviving examples of Botvinnik playing the French as Black came in the 11th and 13th rounds of the 5th Championship when he beat Ilyin-Genevsky and lost to Fyodor Bohatyrchuk. Bohatyrchuk would become another of his nemeses. Later

Botvinnik wouldn't even mention his name in describing their game, which began 1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. Qg4. He said he was tricked into playing it:

"One participant of the tournament (through mutual acquaintances!)" let him know he'd like to play "an opening variation, that was allegedly favorable to White. Model and I analyzed it and decided that the variation was in Black's favor. So I played it 'according to analysis' and fell into a trap! It became clear that it was not only necessary to analyze but to consider the psychological aspects of the tournament struggle."

Botvinnik used psychology earlier in his best game of the tournament:

5th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1927
Ilya Rabinovich–Botvinnik
A95 Dutch Defense

1. d4 e6 2. c4 f5

Botvinnik had met Grisha Abramovich's 1. d4 with 1. ... f5 in 1924 but apparently didn't play that move again for 43 years, Instead, he transposed into the Dutch via 1. d4 e6 and then 2. c4 f5. The reason for this order was he feared the Staunton Gambit, 1. d4 f5 2. e4!? f×e4 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bg5. He had used it as White to crush Solomon Gothilf in the "Tournament of Six Players"—4. ... c6 5. f3 e×f3 6. N×f3 d6?! 7. Bc4 Bg4 8. h3 Bh5 9. g4! Bg6 10. Nh4 Be4? 11. 0–0! d5 12. B×f6 e×f6 13. N×e4 d×c4 14. g5! Qd5 15. Qe2! Kd8 16. Rf5! Qe6 17. Rd1 Kc7 18. d5! Bc5+ 19. Kf1 c×d5 20. N×c5 Q×e2+ 21. K×e2 Re8+ 22. Kf2 1–0.

3. g3 Nf6 4. Bg2 Be7 5. Nc3 0–0 6. Nf3 d5

Botvinnik said he chose the Stonewall Variation because a complicated middlegame was "stylistically unsuitable" for his "peaceful, endgame-oriented opponent." But he continued to play the Stonewall, even after it fell into disrepute as a simple-minded attacking opening. Botvinnik, the most positional of the young Soviets of the 1920s, went his own way.

7. 0–0 c6 8. Qc2 Qe8 9. Bf4 Qh5 10. Rad1 Nbd7 11. b3 Ne4 12. Ne5!

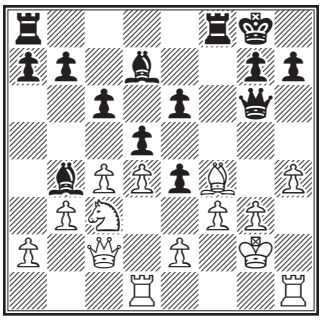
White threatens to change the pawn structure favorably with 13. f3 and 14. e4! as well as with 13. N×e4 and 14. f3!. Moreover, 12. ... N×c3?! 13. Q×c3 N×e5 14. B×e5 Q×e2 favors White after 15. Bf3! Bb4! 16. Q×b4 Q×f3 17. Qd6, as Botvinnik observed. He had developed great sensitivity to handling bishops of opposite colors. The bishops are highly drawish in an endgame but in a middlegame "are always favorable to the side that has the active bishop and unfavorable to the one that has the passive one," as he put it.

12. ... Ng5 13. h4?! Ne4!

White's loosening 13th move justifies the reply, since 14. N×e4 f×e4 15. f3 and 15. ... N×e5 16. B×e5 e×f3 is equal. Botvinnik said White should have played 13. f3 because 13. ... Nh3+ 14. B×h3 Q×h3 15. e4 would favor him.

14. Bf3 Qe8 15. N×d7 B×d7 16. Kg2 Bb4! 17. B×e4?

The surprisingly good retreat 17. Nb1 would prepare 18. c5 and 19. a3 and offer equal chances after 17. ... Bd6 18. B×d6 N×d6.



After 19. ... Qg6

17. ... f×e4 18. Rh1 Qh5 19. f3 Qg6? *(diagram)*

Botvinnik said 19. ... e5! 20. d×e5 Qg6 would have reached the same position as in the game but without allowing White the 21. h5! option. After 19. … Qg6 the threats of ... e×f3+ and ... R×f4 are hard to meet (20. Kf2?? e3+ and 21. ... Q×c2). On 20. Kh2 Black can enter a favorable ending, 20. ... e×f3! 21. Q×g6 h×g6 22. Rd3 B×c3 23. R×c3 f×e2 24. Re3 e5! 25. R×e5 Bg4. The same kind of ending is available after 20. Kf1 but Black has better.

20. Kf1 e5! 21. d×e5

Rudolf Spielmann, one of the elite players who was impressed by this game, pointed out that 21. B×e5 e×f3 would be a winning ending for Black (22. Q×g6 f×e2+ 23. K×e2 h×g6 24. Rd3 Bg4+ 25. Ke1 Rf3). But 21. h5! would have held his edge to a minimum. Botvinnik gave 21. ... Qf5 22. d×e5 e×f3 23. Q×f5 B×f5 24. Rc1 d4 25. Nd1 Be4 and "Black would have to prove his endgame advantage." In his three-volume collection he revised that to say Black would be winning.

21. ... R×f4! 22. g×f4 Qg3!

This is what White misjudged when he allowed the Exchange sacrifice. Black threatens ... Bc5 (or ... e3) and ... Qf2 mate as well as ... Bh3+. For example, 23. c×d5 Bc5 24. N×e4 Bh3+ 25. R×h3 Qg1 mate.

23. N×e4 d×e4! 24. R×d7 Bc5!

Traps such as 24. ... e3? 25. R×g7+! and 26. Rg1 were White's last hope.

25. e3 Q×f3+ 26. Qf2

No better was 26. Kg1 B×e3+ 27. Kh2 B×f4+ 28. Kg1 Qg4+ and ... Q×d7.

26. ... Q×h1+ 27. Ke2 Qh3 28. f5 Qg4+ 29. Kd2 Rf8 30. e6 Q×f5

Not 30. ... R×f5? 31. Rd8+ Bf8 32. Q×f5! Q×f5 33. e7. Botvinnik said White played on because he was "very loath to allow his novice opponent to gain his first victory over one of the strongest masters in the country." Indeed, he was the first master Botvinnik beat in a tournament game.

31. Q×f5 R×f5 32. R×b7 Rf2+ 33. Ke1 Rf6 34. b4 B×e3 35. Ke2 Bg1 36. e7 Kf7 37. e8(Q)+ K×e8 38. R×g7 Rg6 39. R×h7 Bd4! 40. c5 Rg2+ 41. Kf1 Rf2+ 42. Ke1 e3 0–1

Botvinnik made an impression of "sober-mindedess" during the tournament and seemed like a 16-year-old adult. He wore a tie and a jacket and spoke slowly, weighing his words, recalled spectator Boris Vainshtein, who would cross paths with him later. "He was about four years younger than me," Vainshtein recalled, but seemed to act like he was older. Viktor Baturinsky, who held a leadership role in Soviet chess in the 1970s, recalled Botvinnik in this tournament as "a thin youth in oval glasses who appeared somewhat shy in the company of venerable masters, most of whom were at least twice his age."

Botvinnik nearly beat Romanovsky in the sixth round but his inexperience was costly in a heavy piece endgame with Yakov Vilner the next day. By the 11th round he broke into the plus-column for good:

5th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1927
Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky–Botvinnik
C00 French Defense

1. e4 e6 2. Nc3 d5 3. g3 d×e4 4. Bg2 Bd7!

Ilyin-Genevsky was looking to gambit a pawn, 4. ... f5 5. f3!, or play 4. ... Nf6 5. N×e4, as Savielly Tartakower had three months earlier. Black's reply poses problems because 5. N×e4 Bc6! threatens 6. ... f5.

5. Nh3 Bc6 6. 0–0 Nd7 7. N×e4 Ngf6 8. d3?!

Botvinnik wrote that 8. N×f6+ N×f6 9. B×c6+ b×c6 "would have led to roughly the same position as in the game but one perhaps more favorable for Black." Yet 10. d4! would favor White.

8. ... Be7 9. Nf4 0–0 10. Bd2 e5! 11. N×f6+ N×f6 12. B×c6 b×c6 13. Ng2 Qd7 14. Ne3 Nd5 15. Nc4 f6 16. Be3 Rae8

Black's play will come on the kingside, with ... f5 and (or) ... h5, and he need not fear 17. B×a7? c5.

17. a3 a6 18. Kg2 Bd6 19. f3 f5 20. Bg1 Rf6 21. Qe2 h5! 22. Kh1 h4 23. g×h4 Nf4 24. Qd2 Rh6 25. Be3! R×h4 26. B×f4 R×f4 27. Rae1 Qf7 28. Qg2 Qh5 29. Re3

Earlier White passed up an inferior heavy-piece ending (28. R×e5!? B×e5 29. N×e5 R×e5 30. Q×f4 Re2). Now he overlooked a chance for 29. Qg3 Re6 30. Q×f4! or 29. ... Qh6 30. Re2 Rh4 31. Rfe1 with some play.

29. ... Re6 30. Rg1 Qh6 31. b4 Rh4 32. Qe2 Qf4 33. Qg2

Black has been preparing ... R×h2+ and ... Rh6, to reach a favorable K&Q–vs.–K&2R endgame. But the immediate 33. ... R×h2+ 34. Q×h2 Rh6 35. Q×h6 Q×h6+ 36. Kg2 should be salvageable for White. Botvinnik thought 33. Rg2 Reh6 was lost in view of 34. N×e5 R×h2+ 35. R×h2 R×h2+ 36. Q×h2 Q×e3. But 37. f4 is not so clear. Moreover 34. c3! might have held, e.g. 34. ... e4 35. N×d6 c×d6 36. f×e4 f×e4 37. R×e4 or 36. ...

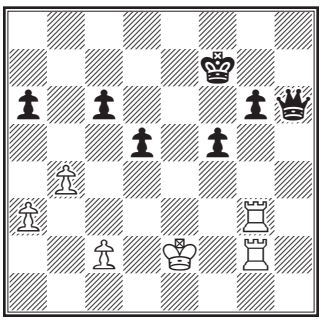
R×h2+ 37. R×h2 R×h2+ 38. Q×h2 Q×e3 39. Q×d6 f×e4 40. Qe6+ Kf8 41. Qf5+ (Khalifman).

33. ... Rg6 34. Qf2 e4! 35. N×d6 R×h2+! 36. Q×h2 Rh6 37. Re2 Q×f3+?

At last Black pulled the trigger on ... R×h2+ and could have won quickly with 37. ... R×h2+ 38. R×h2 Q×f3+ 39. Rhg2 c×d6 40. Kh2 Qh5+ 41. Kg3 g5!. In the game he doesn't get to play ... g5!, which would have mobilized his kingside pawns.

38. Reg2 R×h2+ 39. K×h2 Qh5+ 40. Kg3 c×d6 41. d×e4 Qg4+ 42. Kf2 Qf4+ 43. Ke2 Q×e4+ 44. Kd2 Qd4+ 45. Ke2 Kf7 46. Rg6 Qc3 47. Kd1

To win Black has to advance his kingside pawns while avoiding a trade of heavy pieces into a drawn pawn endgame. For example, 47. ... f4 48. R×g7+ Q×g7 49. R×g7+ K×g7 50. c4! Kf6 51. a4 Ke6 52. a5 looked drawn to Botvinnik because of the threat of b4–b5. (Later analysis showed that Black is winning after 52. ... c5! 53. b5 Kd7 54. b6 d5! 55. c×d5 c4.) Black now tries to make the pawn endgames winnable. But a simpler method is a king march: 47. ... Q×a3 48. R×g7+ Ke6 49. Re1+ Kd5.



After 52. ... g6

47. ... d5 48. R6g3 Qd4+ 49. Ke2 Qe4+ 50. Kd2 Qf4+ 51. Ke2 Qh6 52. R1g2 g6! *(diagram)*

Once more 52. ... f4? would allow a draw from 53. R×g7+. The difference is that 52. ... g6 53. R×g6 Q×g6 54. R×g6 K×g6 55. Kf3 Kg5 is an easy win.

53. a4 f4! 54. Rc3 g5 55. b5!? Qh5+ 56. Kd2 c×b5 57. a×b5 a×b5 58. Rc7+ Kf6 59. Rc6+ Kf5 60. Rc5 Qf7 61. R×b5 g4 62. c4 f3 63. Rg1 f2 64. Rf1 g3 65. R×d5+ Kg4 66. Rd4+ Kh3 0–1

A cute trap is 66. ... Kf3 67. Rb1 g2?? 68. Rb3 mate. But 67. ... Kg2 wins.

"What if Misha should finish first?" Romanovsky had said at the start of the tournament, then laughed at his own joke. Botvinnik's goal was more modest: an even score of 10 points would earn him the master title.

That was well within reach because after he secured 6½ points in the first 12 rounds, he was past the toughest part of his schedule. In fact, he won five of his next six games and was in contention for a top prize. But in his two final games he had to settle for draws with Alexey Selesniev, who was best known as a study composer, and Andrei Smorodsky, a former Red Army champion. He ended up in a tie for fifth place with Vladimir Makogonov, who was also earning the master title in his Soviet Championship debut.

Today, when every year 15-year-olds earn the grandmaster title, the achievement of Botvinnik seems unimpressive. But until the 1990s, such a performance by a 16-year-old would make him a "prodigy" to behold. Botvinnik dryly noted in *Analytical* that his result "did not provoke raptures" and that "the Moscow chess journal *Shakhmaty* published the only four games I lost." As Sergei Voronkov pointed out, it was only two.

Leningrad Studies

In his memoirs Botvinnik made little mention of six events in which he played between the 5th and 6th Soviet championships. These included a metal workers trade union championship in the winter of 1927-28 and a Rabpros (education workers) championship the next winter, as well as a Leningrad–Riga match in February 1928, an All-Russia University Championship in January 1929 and a Leningrad State University vs. Moscow State University match in May 1929.

Still, the tournaments must have meant a lot to him at the time. Money prizes had been abolished in Soviet championships but the first prize he won in February 1928 in the metal workers tournament was 40 rubles. That was the price of a good men's suit. This was at a time when a factory foreman earned 100 rubles a month.

Leningrad University–Moscow University team match
Leningrad 1929
Botvinnik–Grigory Goldberg
D60 Queen's Gambit Declined

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 d5 4. Bg5 Nbd7 5. e3 c6 6. Nf3 Be7 7. Bd3 0–0 8. 0–0 d×c4 9. B×c4 b5 10. Bd3 Bb7 11. Rc1 a6 12. a4

This was Botvinnik's favorite way of handling such positions, rather than 12. B×f6 N×f6 13. Ne4 to exploit Black's bad queen bishop. In Botvinnik–Kagan, Leningrad Championship 1926, he won with textbook technique after 12. ... b4 13. Ne4 N×e4 14. B×e7 Q×e7 15. B×e4 Rac8 16. Nd2 f5? 17. Bf3 e5 18. Nb3! e4 19. Be2 Nf6 20. Nc5.

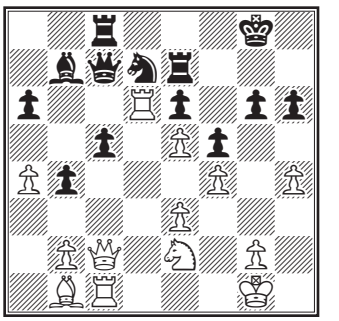
12. ... Rc8 13. Qe2 Re8 14. Rfd1 Qb6 15. Ne5! h6 16. Bh4 N×e5 17. d×e5 Nd7

White gets the upper hand after 17. ... Nd5 18. B×e7 N×c3 if he plays 19. b×c3! R×e7 20. Bc2! followed by Rd6 and Qd3.

18. B×e7 R×e7 19. f4 Nc5 20. Bb1 b4? 21. Qc2!

By 1929 Botvinnik wanted more than the small positional edge he could get with 21. Ne4 N×e4 22. B×e4. He wants to weaken Black's kingside with ... g6 and h4–h5.

21. ... g6 22. Ne2 Nd7 23. Rd4 c5 24. Rd6 Qc7 25. h4 f5? *(diagram)*



After 25. ... f5

It appeared that stopping h2–h4–h5×g6 with 25. ... h5 would just invite 26. Ng3 and N×h5. But 26. ... Nf8 holds White's superiority to a minimum. Now he can win tactically — but not by 26. e×f6 N×f6 27. Q×g6+ Rg7.

26. Ba2! Kf7 27. Nd4! Nf8 28. Qd2 Qa5 29. N×e6! N×e6 30. R×e6 R×e6 31. Qd7+ Kf8 32. Q×e6 1–0

White would have had a choice of wins after 29. ... Q×a4 and 30. N×f8+ K×f8 31. Rf6+ Ke8 32. Be6 is fastest.

In another team event Botvinnik played Boris Vainshtein, who had been impressed by his maturity at the 5th Championship. Vainshtein, the first board for Tashkent, adjourned with an extra piece. The game was to be adjudicated and the head of the adjudication panel was Fyodor Duz-Khotomirsky, "my close friend and chess tutor," Vainshtein recalled. "Duz" shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, what is here to look at? An extra piece."

But Botvinnik insisted on seeing Vainshtein's sealed move. When it was revealed, he sighed with relief because it wasn't the best. After some analysis together Botvinnik said, "To me, it's a draw." Vainshtein didn't object ("I didn't want to press for a win") and told his opponent, "Mikhail Moiseyevich, I imagine that if this was played out, you would lose." This apparently upset Botvinnik, and he couldn't have been happy when the Leningrad newspaper *Krasnaya Gazeta* reported that the sensation of the match was the upset of the famous Botvinnik by a student from far Tashkent. The game has disappeared but it seems to have created bad blood that would spill out 16 years later.

On the other hand, his relations with Romanovsky improved. After he lost a game in 1928, he showed it to the old master. "'Pyotr Arsenyevich,' I said with an injured tone, 'How could I have lost this game?'" Romanovsky replied, "When you lose a game you should have won, Misha, it means you didn't want to win *enough*."

Instead of chess, Botvinnik's memoirs focus for this period on his education. The requirements and syllabuses in the social sciences and literature were in political flux as the Soviet authorities struggled to decide how much dogma to include. Botvinnik ended up in a study group of 12 students and a teacher. "Everybody smoked, and so as not to be a rare bird, I started smoking for two months," he wrote. "Once these studies were over I gave up smoking at once."

But he wasn't accepted by the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute initially because, he said, only children of "specialists" such as workers or engineers got in. Botvinnik, as the son of a dental assistant, didn't qualify. But Yakov Rokhlin came to the rescue. He appealed on the grounds that Moisei Botvinnik was a "doctor-worker"—whatever that meant. But it did the ideological trick and after two months Botvinnik was admitted to the mathematics and mathematical physics department of another institution, Leningrad State University.

Yet he wanted to get into the electric/mechanical department of the more prestigious Polytechnic. A senior bureaucrat sent a letter to the Polytechnic dean on January 14, 1929, that said "Comrade Botvinnik is the youngest chess master in the Soviet Union and has a great capacity for the mathematical and physical sciences." He was accepted as a student that month.

In the summer of 1929 Botvinnik spent six weeks at a boot camp for Leningrad Polytechnic students. In his first game collections, Botvinnik didn't mention his military training but said he went to Krechevitsa because "we students spent the summer there." He was more candid in *Achieving the Aim* and recalled how he lived in a canvas tent and performed chores like scrubbing out-of-date airplanes on an airfield. At the camp he also

tried blindfold chess "for the only time in my life." He played three games simultaneously "not experiencing any difficulty." He added that Krylenko had banned blindfold play (but this appears to have happened only after the 6th Championship).

Botvinnik also tried speed chess. More than a half century later he told *New in Chess,* "The last time I played blitz was in 1929 on a train. We traveled with a team from Leningrad to Odessa to play a championship match and we had a blitz tournament during the train journey. I came [in] first."

But blindfold chess in boot camp and blitz on a train were poor preparation for the national championship. The tournament's format was reorganized into a three-stage event for 36 players. Botvinnik had an easy time winning his nine-player quarterfinals.

6th Soviet Championship Quarterfinals, Odessa 1929
Sergei Mudrov–Botvinnik
A40 Stonewall Attack

1. d4 Nf6 2. e3 e6 3. Bd3 Be7 4. f4 c5 5. c3 b6 6. Nf3 0–0 7. 0–0 Ba6 8. B×a6 N×a6

Considering how glacially chess information traveled in 1929 it's unlikely Botvinnik knew of how Capablanca dismantled Edgard Colle's favorite opening a month earlier at Carlsbad with a similar ... Ba6 strategy: 1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 b6 3. e3 Bb7 4. Nbd2 e6 5. Bd3 c5 6. 0–0 Nc6 7. c3 Be7 8. e4 c×d4! 9. N×d4 0–0 10. Qe2 Ne5! 11. Bc2 Qc8 12. f4 Ba6.

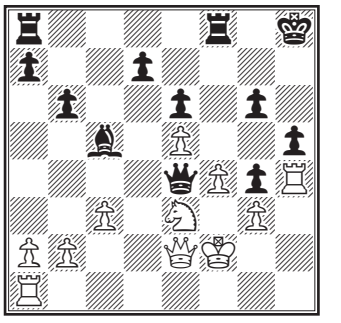
9. Qe2 Qc8 10. e4 Qb7 11. Nbd2 c×d4 12. e5?

After 12. c×d4 Black occupies the c-file with ... Rac8 and ... Nb4–c2. But 12. N×d4 was reasonable. The text allows 12. ... d×c3! (13. e×f6 Bc5+ 14. Kh1 c×d2 with advantage).

12. ... Nd5? 13. N×d4 f5 14. Rf3 Nc5 15. Nf1 Ne4 16. Rh3

The same kind of attack failed Colle. Better was 16. Ng3 and perhaps 16. ... N×g3 17. h×g3 with the idea of g3–g4 followed by g×f5.

16. ... g6 17. g4 Kh8 18. Ng3 N×g3 19. h×g3 Bc5 20. Be3? f×g4! 21. Rh4 h5 22. Nc2 N×e3 23. N×e3 Qe4! 24. Kf2? *(diagram)*



After 24. Kf2

Now 24. ... Q×e5 would add a second, and decisive, pawn. But:

24. ... R×f4+! 25. g×f4 Q×f4+ 26. Ke1

No better is 26. Kg2 Qe4+ 27. Kf2 Rf8+ or 27. Kh2 B×e3 28. Re1 Q×e5+ 29. Kg2 Qd5+.

26. ... B×e3 27. Rh1 Rf8 28. Rf1 Bd2+! 0–1

Botvinnik's final quarterfinals opponent was Abram Polyak, who is best remembered as the husband and trainer of women's world champion Olga Rubtsova and the father of women's grandmaster Elena Fatalibekova. A draw with Polyak would likely win the section

but Vsevolod Rauzer, an aspiring opening theoretician, approached Botvinnik beforehand and asked him as a favor to win because they would both reach the semifinals. Botvinnik did win and Rauzer earned the master title.

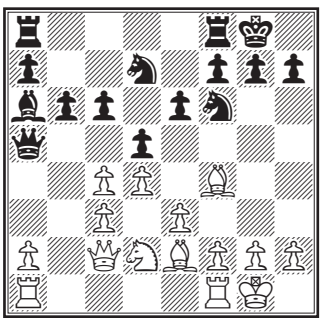
Botvinnik was much less generous when another issue came up. The tournament rules said three players from each of the four quarterfinals would advance. Ilyin-Genevsky tied for third in his section but lost out on tie-breaks. However, Nikolai Grigoriev, chairman of the tournament committee, gathered all the players and asked them to waive the rules and include Ilyin-Genevsky, by then a legendary figure in Soviet chess.

Their vote had to be unanimous. Botvinnik stood up and said, "I'm against. It's a breaking of the rules." In his memoirs, he wrote, "Alexander Fyodorovich [Ilyin-Genevsky] immediately left Odessa." He admitted this was "a dirty trick" but said Ilyin-Genevsky never reproached him for it. "Apparently he understood my character."

Where did this character in regard to chess come from? Botvinnik gave a hint in a 1977 lecture:

"I recall in one tournament my opponent didn't appear on time at the next round. But his second came to explain to the judge and me that the comrade was ill and therefore he couldn't play in view of the public and requested transferring the table behind the curtain. I, out of lack of experience, agreed. My opponent appeared within a half hour and announced that he didn't want to play behind the curtains. The table was again placed on the stage. I demanded that, since he was late and could play on the stage, to put on the clocks the time which had passed since the official start of the round. The judges wouldn't do this. Of course, I was besides myself and couldn't play normally. I lost the game but the lesson for me I mastered for the entire life. Since then there hasn't been any kind of breaking of the rules."

Although it was just six years since Lenya Baskin showed him how the pieces move, Botvinnik was one of the favorites to win the 6th Championship. Ilyin-Genevsky blamed "the failure of Botvinnik" on the three-stage format, which exhausted him.



Pyotr Izmailov–Botvinnik,
6th Soviet Championship Semifinals,
Odessa 1929
After 12. Bf4

In another Cambridge Springs Variation, Botvinnik could have approached equality with 12. ... d×c4 or 12. ... c5. But he played **12. ... Rac8??**, overlooking **13. Bd6!** with its twin threats of 14. B×f8 and 14. Bb4. He resigned after **13. ... c5 14. B×f8**. It was his shortest-ever recorded loss.

Botvinnik recovered the next day with a win over Vladislav Silich, many-time champion of Vitebsk. But on the day after that he was the victim of his own suspicious nature.

His opponent, Ilya Kan, 20, didn't know what opening to play. So he consulted two veterans, Duz-Khotimirsky and Sergei von Freiman. They suggested the Evans Gambit.

Even though he had grown up reading Mikhail Chigorin's *Shakhmatny Listok* Botvinnik had contempt for Romantic openings. Speaking of the composer Sergei Prokofiev, whom he met during Moscow 1936, he said, "Was Prokofiev a strong player? No, the King's Gambit, sacrifices, everything forward and so (violinist David) Oistrakh easily won against him."

6th Soviet Championship, semifinals, Odessa 1929
Ilya Kan–Mikhail Botvinnik
C51 Evans Gambit

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. b4

In his memoirs, Kan said it was hard "to not break out laughing" here.

4. ... Bb6?!

Considering Botvinnik's view of gambits and the extent of Kan's preparation, 4. ... B×b4! might have been a winning move. But Botvinnik misread Kan and believed he had prepared the Evans. Because of Botvinnik's psychological approach, he avoided the main line: He allowed himself to be bluffed.

5. a4 a6 6. Nc3 Nf6 7. Nd5

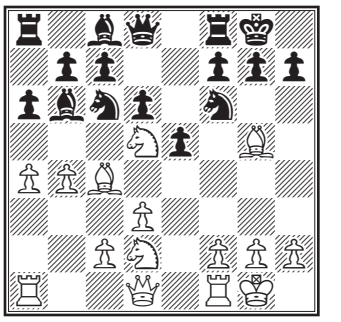
Kan was improvising "since I didn't have the slightest understanding of the theory of the Evans Gambit Declined," he recalled. There are pitfalls for Black, such as 7. ... N×d5 8. e×d5 N×b4? 9. Ba3 with advantage to White. But Black has no problems if he chooses instead 8. ... Nd4 or 8. ... e4! 9. d×c6 0–0!.

7. ... N×e4? 8. 0–0 0–0 9. d3 Nf6

Not 9. ... Nd6? 10. Bg5! Qe8 11. a5 Ba7? 12. N×c7. If Botvinnik had understood how bad this was getting he would have bailed out with 9. ... N×f2 10. R×f2 B×f2+ 11. K×f2 d6 with only a slightly worse game.

10. Bg5 d6 11. Nd2! *(diagram)*

Best is 11. ... Be6 12. Ne4! B×d5 13. B×d5 N×b4, although 14. N×f6+ g×f6 15. Bh6 is no fun. Another master, Veniamin Sozin, agreed that tiredness was to blame. "Evidently, Botvinnik didn't consider his strength, playing for a win in all the games of the preliminary tournament," he said.



After 11. Nd2

11. ... Bg4? 12. B×f6! Qc8 13. N×b6 c×b6 14. f3 Be6 15. Bh4 N×b4 16. Be7 Qc5+ 17. Kh1 Rfe8 18. Ne4 Qc6 19. B×d6 1–0

A final round draw left Botvinnik with an even score and he was eliminated before the finals. Rokhlin passed on to him the words of a tournament organizer. "If Botvinnik knew how to conduct himself a bit more modestly we could enlarge the field of the finals and allow him in," he was told. This was a reference to his "impertinence" in regard to Ilyin-Genevsky and other players, according to author Viktor Vasiliev.

Botvinnik's response sounds like it could have come out of the mouth of 18-year-old Bobby Fischer: "Tell him I don't need patronage. And if I reach the finals the next time, it will be because I did it." Botvinnik didn't include any of his 13 Odessa games in his books. Sergei Voronkov said it appeared the tournament "left a scar on the soul" of Botvinnik.

He played a minor role in the most remarkable Soviet chess event of 1930. An anonymous player, who called himself "Iks" — or "X" as many would say — challenged ten of the best Leningrad players to a correspondence match. "Iks" claimed to have devised a new "system," like Nimzowitsch, and wanted to test it in a simultaneous exhibition. Each day his opponents would send their latest moves to the newspaper *Smyena.* "Iks" would reply that night by telephone.

On January 18, 1930, *Smyena* reported the stunning first result: Ilyin-Genevsky had resigned to "Iks." Two days later "Iks" refused Botvinnik's draw offer. "Iks" eventually agreed to a draw with him at move 30, on February 8. The match ended with 7 "Iks" wins and 3 draws.

It was a national sensation. Abram Model decided to investigate the affair. He revealed in a magazine article that "Iks" was ... Abram Model. "Admittedly, at critical moments, he would visit his friends and 'help' them to analyze," Botvinnik wrote in *Achieving the Aim.* Nevertheless, he said, it was a remarkable achievement.

First Places

"In 1930 I had occasion to play in a tournament in which only masters were invited," Botvinnik wrote of the nine-player round robin that began in March. He started with convincing wins over Ilyin-Genevsky and Vyacheslav Ragozin, who would become a close ally for the next 30 years. Then came a loss to Model, followed by his first-ever win from Romanovsky, thanks to an endgame blunder. The tournament was played at a rate of two rounds a week at various Leningrad locations. A draw in the final round on May 7 secured first place. It was the first master tournament Botvinnik won. His prize was a German chess clock, which lasted some 20 years until "my daughter's nanny" began using it in some fashion and "it finally gave out."

His superiority over the other Leningraders was cemented in the next city championship, held from December 1930 to January 1931. The time limit was slow by today's standard, 37 moves in a two and a half hours. The schedule was designed for full-time workers. Play was held from 6:45 P.M. until 11:45.

Leningrad Championship 1930-31
Botvinnik–Georgy Lisitsyn
A53 King's Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 d6 3. Nc3 Nbd7 4. e4 e5 5. Nge2 e×d4?! 6. N×d4 g6 7. Be2 Bg7 8. Be3 0–0 9. Qd2 Re8 10. f3 Nf8?

Black won't get enough piece play from this pawn structure and should try to change it, e.g. 10. ... c6 (11. 0–0 d5! 12. c×d5 c×d5 13. e×d5 Nb6).

11. 0–0 Bd7 12. Rad1 Ne6 13. Nc2

One of Botvinnik's rules held that you shouldn't trade pieces in a favorable position unless it improved your chances. Here he rejected 13. N×e6 B×e6 14. Bg5 followed by Qf4–h4. But at other times he liked the Bg5 idea, which Nimzowitsch used impressively at Carlsbad 1929. In a 1931 Leningrad trade union team championship his game with V. Breitman went 1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. g3 0–0 6. Bg2 Nc6 7. Nge2 Bg4? 8. f3 Bd7 9. Be3 Qc8 10. g4! e5 11. d5 Na5 12. b3 b6? 13. Qd2 Nb7 14. Bg5!, threatening to win à la Nimzo with h2–h4–h5. The game ended with 14. ... Nc5 15. Ng3 a6 16. h4 b5 17. b4 Nb7 18. c×b5 a×b5 19. h5 c5 20. d×c6 B×c6 21. Bh6 Qc7 22. Rc1 Qe7? 23. Nf5! 1–0 in view of 23. ... g×f5 24. Qg5.

13. ... Bc6 14. Nb4! a5 15. Nbd5!

This, and 15. Nc2 followed by Na3–b5, are more promising than 15. N×c6 b×c6 16. f4 Qb8, when Black at least has the b-file to use.

15. ... Nd7 16. Bd3 Ne5 17. Be2 Nd7 18. b3 Ndc5 19. Qc2?!

This threatens f3–f4–f5–f6 but releases pressure on the d-file.

19. ... Bd7! 20. f4 c6! 21. f5 c×d5

Black is lost after 21. ... Nc7? 22. Nb6 and worse after 21. ... Nf8 22. f6! Bh8 23. Ne7+ R×e7 24. f×e7. But 21. ... Ng5 22. f6 c×d5 23. f×g7 Ng×e4 was possible.

22. f×e6 f×e6?

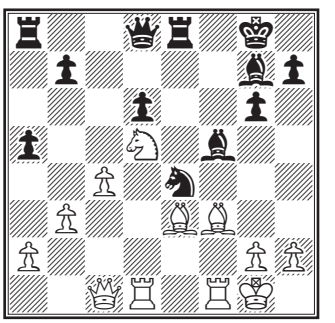
King's Indian players would learn from games like this that the pawn structure is fine for Black after 22. ... B×e6 23. e×d5 Bf5 or 23. c×d5 Bd7.

23. e×d5 e×d5

But the structure is bad for him after 23. ... e5 24. B×c5! d×c5 25. Bf3.

24. N×d5 Bf5 25. Qc1 Ne4 26. Bf3 *(diagram)*

White can improve his position with Bd4×g7 and a timely g2–g4. But the tempting 27. Bb6 Qh4 28. Nc7 walks into the unclear 28. ... Be5!.



After 26. Bf3

26. ... h5? 27. Bd4

Also good was 27. B×h5 because 27. ... Qh4 allows 28. R×f5!.

27. ... Qg5?! 28. Q×g5 N×g5 29. B×g7 N×f3+ 30. g×f3 K×g7 31. Nc7 1–0

Vladimir Alatortsev, a Romanovsky protégé who increasingly looked like a Botvinnik rival, took the tournament lead with four wins and a draw. But he fell off the pace. Botvinnik won his final six games and took first place with an impressive margin of two and a half points.

How did Botvinnik manage his steady improvement through the years 1927 to 1931 while many Russian families were overwhelmed by the Five-Year Plan and other tumultuous changes? One answer is that the Botvinniks relied on Isya's income. He was being given greater responsibility in city jobs and, according to Mikhail Botvinnik, eventually "created the first system of traffic lights in Leningrad."

Meanwhile, Misha was studying electrical mechanics, physics and other difficult subjects. He was able to handle the load, he explained, because the Soviet educational *vlasti,* or higher authorities, realized that the drive towards industrialization — that magic word — demanded an army of new technicians. This in turn required a lowering of standards.

"The decision was made to make study easier," he wrote. This benefited him because "I was not overloaded with an excessive volume of knowledge, and I could use my nerve cells for taking decisions in original situations."

3. Rivals

For all his domestic renown, Mikhail Botvinnik got little respect beyond Soviet borders. In 1931 his former simul opponent, José Capablanca, was asked — by Evgeny Znosko-Borovsky, in the Russian-language Parisian newspaper *Posledniye Novosti* — about the world's talented young players. Capa spoke of the fine qualities of Salo Flohr, Gösta Stoltz, Arthur Dake, Vladas Mikenas, Isaac Kashdan and Sultan Khan. He mentioned no Soviets.

Botvinnik lacked respect even in Moscow. The rivalry between the new Soviet capital and the former one was evident when Yakov Rokhlin visited Moscow in summer 1930. Nikolai Grigoriev took him to a popular club where Rokhlin was confronted by Abram Rabinovich. Rabinovich, an accountant and a master since 1909, was the chess editor of the influential newspaper *Vechernyaya Moskva* and a booster of the city's pride, 21-year-old Nikolai Riumin. He complained that Rokhlin was "making a big fuss about Botvinnik. You know he's a dry, cold player," he said. "Tell the Leningraders they can't make a world champion out of Botvinnik. But here is Riumin — a genuine player!"

Which of the rivals would be deemed No. 1 would have a huge impact on Botvinnik's career. The reason is that in the Soviet mindset, *the state could only support one world championship challenger.* The situation in America, for example, where both Reuben Fine and Samuel Reshevsky would aspire to the title, was unthinkable in the USSR. This put considerable pressure on Botvinnik in virtually every performance for nearly two decades.

Riumin had burst out of the first-category ranks in early 1931 by crushing Grigoriev in a match, 6½–½. If Nikolai Krylenko had any say in it — and he had more than almost anyone else — the state would endorse Riumin, an ethnic Russian with a sturdy "worker" background, unlike Botvinnik and his somewhat suspect (bourgeois, Jewish, Menshevik) family origins.

Their rivalry would reach its pinnacle in the denouement of the 7th Soviet Championship in 1931. But to get that far Botvinnik had to survive a shaky performance in the semifinals, held in Moscow's October Hall of the House of Unions. This was a huge event with eight ten-man sections. In fact, the first round was delayed while the organizers scrambled to find enough clocks. Botvinnik needed seven points out of nine to be certain of qualifying for the finals. He seemed well on the way when he won his first four games, beginning with this.

7th Soviet Championship, semifinals, Moscow 1931
A. Akshanov–Mikhail Botvinnik
E35 Nimzo-Indian Defense

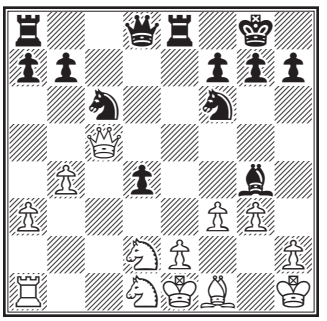
1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. Qc2 d5 5. Nf3 c5 6. c×d5 e×d5

This position is normally reached via 5. c×d5 e×d5 6. Nf3 c5 because 5. Nf3?! could have been punished by 5. ... d×c4! 6. e3 b5.

As played, a natural continuation is 7. Bg5, as in Veresov–Botvinnik, Soviet Championship 1944. But that turned in Black's favor after 7. ... h6 8. B×f6 Q×f6 9. a3 Ba5?! 10. 0–0–0 B×c3! 11. Q×c3 c4 12. Qe3+? Be6 13. Ne5 Nc6 14. g4 0–0–0! 15. f4 Rhe8 16. Qf3 Qe7 17. e3 Na5! and ... f6.

7. Bd2? c×d4! 8. N×d4 0–0 9. g3? Qb6

Akshanov, a minor player from Tblisi in Soviet Georgia, is being punished for his tepid handling of the opening (10. Be3? Ng4).



After 16. f3

10. Nf3 d4 11. Nd1 Nc6 12. a3 B×d2+ 13. N×d2

Or 13. Q×d2 Ne4 14. Qc2 Bf5 with advantage to Black. White should hurry with Bg2 and 0–0 now.

13. ... Bg4! 14. b4? Rfe8 15. Qc5 Qd8 16. f3 *(diagram)*

Black had a choice of promising alternatives earlier, including 14. ... Rac8 and 15. ... Q×c5 16. b×c5 Ne5 17. Nb2 Rac8. Here 16. ... Ne5! would win in view of 17. ... Nd3 mate or 17. ... B×f3, e.g. 17. Kf2 d3! 18. f×g4 d×e2.

16. ... Rc8! 17. Kf2

White would also lose after 17. f×g4 Ne5 18. Qb5 a6 19. Qa4 Nd3 mate and 17. Bg2 d3 18. f×g4 Nd4 (or 18. e3 Nd4).

17. ... Ne5 18. Q×a7 Rc2 19. f×g4 R×d2 20. Q×b7 d3 21. Rc1 d×e2 22. B×e2 Nd3+ 23. Kf1 0–1

The end might have been 23. ... Re×e2 24. Rc8 Re1 mate.

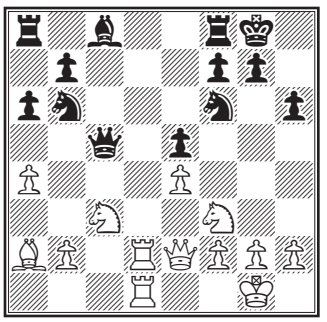
Too Much Schnitzel

Botvinnik's chances of reaching the championship finals suffered a near-disastrous blow when he lost two games in a row. He blamed a bad decision about lunch:

The players were entitled to a free meal at their hotel buffet. Before the fifth round of the semifinals, he ate twice. "I decided to eat another tasty schnitzel (they were hungry times). I moved to another table. The waitress naturally brought me a bowl of borscht. I couldn't refuse. It would have been clear that I already ate. So I had to eat not only the schnitzel but the borscht," he recalled in *Analytical.*

His game with Alexander Konstantinopolsky began a short time later and he obtained a slight edge as White in a Dutch Defense — but "fell asleep." "When I 'woke up' the position was lost," he said. The next day he was ground down in a Queen's Indian Defense by Pyotr Izmailov, the same player who trounced him in 14 moves in the previous championship. "This is what sometimes comes from an extra meal," Botvinnik wrote. But he recovered by beating the section leader, endgame composer Genrikh Kasparian. Together they advanced to the finals.

Botvinnik began the finals by accepting a knight sacrifice from Ilyin-Genevsky and being outplayed. But the next two rounds were marked by splendid endgames that would appear in textbooks for decades. One was a fine rook ending against Kasparian. The other was:



Botvinnik–Nikolai Sorokin, Moscow 1951
After 19. ... e5

Computers prefer routine moves such as 20. Rc2. In 2013 an amateur, Sergei Smotky, made a convincing case that 20. Rd6! would give White a clear edge after, say, 20. ... Bg4 21. a5! Q×a5 22. R×f6! g×f6 23. h3 Bh5 24. Qe3!. But Botvinnik felt that Black's only active piece should be traded off, not just harassed, and he made one of his most famous moves.

20. Qe3 Q×e3 21. f×e3

Black must tread carefully, e.g. 21. ... Re8! 22. a5 Nbd7 and then 23. Na4 Rb8 24. Rd6 Re7 with a passive but likely sufficient defense.

21. ... Bg4 22. a5 Nc8 23. Rc1 B×f3

This capture is premature since 23. ... Re8 24. h3 B×f3! (rather than bishop retreats, as suggested by Botvinnik) gets the same kind of position as in the game but with an extra tempo and a White weakness at h3.

24. g×f3 Ne7 25. Nd5 Nc6?

Black goes downhill after this. With 25. ... Ne×d5 26. B×d5 Rab8 he might hold, according to Khalifman. Smotky argued, instead, for 25. ... Nf×d5 26. e×d5 Rac8 and then 27. R×c8 N×c8! followed by ... Nd6. (Or 28. d6 Rd8 29. d7 Ne7 and ... Nc6.) He said 26. B×d5! is a better try but Black can defend after 26. ... N×d5 27. e×d5! Rac8 28. Rdc2 Rcd8 29. e4 f5!.

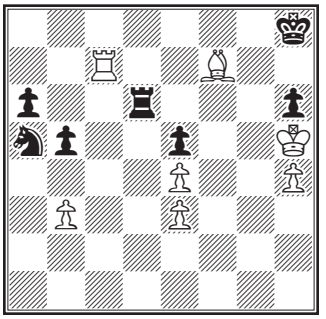
So what can we conclude about White's dramatic 20th move? It was routinely awarded

one or two exclamation points for decades. But Khalifman gave it only "!?." According to Smotky's heretical view it should be just a question mark because it nearly threw away a major advantage.

26. N×f6+ g×f6 27. Rd7 Rab8 28. Kf2! N×a5 29. Rcc7 Rbc8 30. R×f7 R×c7 31. R×c7+ Kh8 32. Bd5!

The rest of the game is worthy of the textbook status it has achieved. White "stalemates" the knight and finds a way to win on the kingside.

32. ... b5 33. b3! Rd8 34. Kg3 f5 35. Kh4 f×e4 36. f×e4 Rd6 37. Kh5 Rf6 38. h3 Rd6 39. h4 Rb6 40. Kg4 Rf6 41. Ra7 Rb6 42. Re7 Rd6 43. Rc7!



After 47. Bf7

Not 43. R×e5 Nc6, when the knight gets to play.

43. ... Rf6 44. Ra7 Rb6 45. Rc7 Rf6 46. Kh5 Rd6 47. Bf7! *(diagram)*

White threatens Bg6 and K×h6 followed by Rc8+ or pushing the h-pawn. The Black king can't escape (47. ... Kg7 48. b4! Nc6 49. Bd5+).

47. ... Rf6 48. Bg6 N×b3 49. K×h6 Rf8 50. Rh7+ Kg7 51. Rg7+ Kh8 52. Bf7! R×f7 53. R×f7 Kg8 54. Kg6 Nd2? 55. Rd7 1–0

Botvinnik kept his streak going the next day against Viktor Goglidze, for many years the strongest Georgian player. Botvinnik's original notes were not included in his game collections but appeared in *64* for his 80th birthday. He wrote in a wordy way then but later became "laconic" because he was impressed by Stalin's terse speeches, according to Viktor Malkin. Here are excerpts:

7th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1931
Botvinnik–Viktor Goglidze
D94 Grünfeld Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5

"In its time this defense had as much popularity as the Nimzowitsch Defense (1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4) does in our day. But it gradually disappeared from tournament practice and is now rather rarely met. How to explain this? The fundamental idea of the defense is very simple. Black plays the Orthodox Variation only without the move ... e6, developing the king's bishop on g7. The advantage in comparison with the Orthodox Defense is that Black's queen's bishop is not locked in (as is known, the difficulty of developing the c8-bishop is the main deficiency of the Orthodox Defense). It would seem that the Grünfeld Defense is very comfortable. But with the correct procedure White all the same forces Black to play ... e6 and in that way the idea of the defense turns out unfulfilled."

4. Nf3 Bg7 5. e3

Botvinnik gave White's last move an exclamation point and said that Black must choose between 5. ... d×c4, with an inferior center and lag in development, and 5. ... c6, with a constricted position. That was why the Grünfeld had "gradually disappeared," he said. (Today the Grünfeld is a major opening thanks to improvements such as 5. ... 0–0 6. Qb3 d×c4 7. B×c4 c5! and 6. c×d5 N×d5 7. Bc4 N×c3 8. b×c3 c5.)

5. ... c6 6. Bd3 0–0 7. 0–0 e6 8. b3

"Of course! White is not at all required to play 8. Qb3. Instead of this he can develop his c1-bishop on a3 with advantage," he wrote. "Another plan consists of the quick opening of play by means of 8. e4 d×e4 9. N×e4 N×e4 10. B×e4. But from the point of view of the position this plan is not good, since Black obtains the possibility of pressuring the d4-pawn along the a1–h8 diagonal and the d-file."

8. ... Nbd7 9. Ba3 Re8 10. Rc1 b6

"The only possibility of developing the c8-bishop. The break in the center 9. ... e5 10. d×e5 N×e5 11. N×e5 R×e5 12. c×d5 c×d5 (12. ... N×d5 13. Ne4) led to an isolated pawn without any compensation for Black."

11. Qe2 a6 12. Rfd1 Bb7 13. Bd6! Nh5 14. b4 b5 15. c5 Nb6?

"Black doesn't understand the position. Only one time in the game he received the chance to free his game by means of ... e5 and he lets the possibility slip. After 15. ... e5! 16. d×e5 N×e5 17. N×e5 B×e5 18. B×e5 R×e5 19. Qb2 Qe7 29. a4 White would stand only slightly better. Instead of that Black is enticed by 'positional advantages'—the two bishops and passed pawn—and as a result ends up in almost a stalemated position."

16. Be5 Nc4 17. B×c4 b×c4

"Black received a passed but 'dead' pawn and White's chances on the queen's flank are preferable. Black is in no condition to exploit the two bishops because the bishop at b7 only has potential energy."

18. a4 Bf8 19. h3! f6 20. Bh2 Qd7 21. Ra1 Ng7 22. Kh1 Nf5 23. e4 Nh6 24. Rg1! Nf7 25. e5

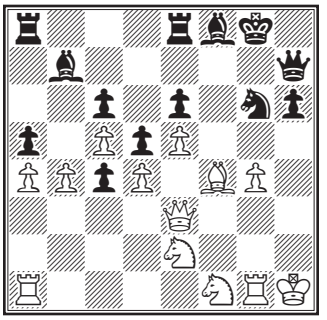
"Just in time! The prepared ... e5 break is prevented."

25. ... f5 26. g4 f×g4 27. h×g4 g5

"Necessary. White threatened to play 28. g5 and transfer one of the knights to f6. But now the knight can reach f6 through h5 and White can carry out the f2–f4 break."

28. Qe3 h6 29. Nd2

"White conducts the attack inexactly," Botvinnik wrote, saying that he should have transferred the c3-knight to the kingside. "It's doubtful that after 29. Ne2! Nh8 30. Ng3 Ng6 31. Nh5 Be7! 32. Nf6+ B×f6 33. e×f6 Qf7 34. Be5 Nf8 35. Nd2 Nh7 36. f4! Black could save the game." But Khalifman suggests 34. ... N×e5 is better, e.g. 35. d×e5 a5 36. b5? (36. Rgb1!) c×b5 37. a×b5 d4! and the bad bishop comes alive.



After 33. ... a5

29. ... Nh8 30. f4?

This is why White's edge slips. Again 30. Ne2 was best (30. ... Ng6 31. f4).

30. ... g×f4 31. B×f4 Qh7 32. Nf1 Ng6 33. Ne2 a5! *(diagram)*

"A marvelous trap! White had calculated only 33. ... N×f4 34. N×f4 Be7! 35. Nh3! (35. N×e6 Bc8 36. Nf4 Bg5 and the bishops come alive, or 36. Nc7 Bg5 37. N×e8 B×e3 38. Nf6+ Kg7 39. N×h7 B×d4!) Rf8 36. Nh2 and the threat of g5 is very strong." The trap he mentions was 34. b5 a×b5 35. a×b5 and now 35. ... B×c5! (36. d×c5 d4+) 36. B×h6 N×e5 "and Black wins easily." But this is wrong because White could win with 37. Qg5+!. Better is the unclear 36. ... Rf8.

34. b×a5 R×a5?

"A terrible move," Botvinnik wrote. The rook needs to be able to go to the b-file so 34. ... Ba6! is best. "It's difficult to say whether this counterplay is sufficient to save the game but there's no doubt that in it was the last and not a bad Black chance."

35. Nfg3 Rea8 36. Nh5 Bg7 37. Nc3 N×f4? 38. N×f4! Bc8 39. Ra2 Rb8

"Too late!" was Botvinnik's comment. Khalifman said Black's final chance was 37. ... Rf8 and then 38. Ra2 N×f4 39. N×f4 Bc8 40. Rh2 Ra7 41. g5 Qf5 42. N×e6 B×e6 43. g×h6 Qf3+ 44. Q×f3 R×f3.

40. Rh2 Rb3 41. g5! h5 42. N×h5 Qd3

"Perpetual check with 42. ... R×c3 43. Q×c3 Qe4+ doesn't work because of 43. Nf6+!"

43. Qf4! R×c3 44. Nf6+ Kf8 45. Ne4+! Ke8 46. Nd6+ Kd8 47. Rh8+! B×h8 48. Qf8+ 1–0

Veniamin Sozin, who headed the opening theory section of *Shakhmatny Listok,* brought Botvinnik down to earth. This was the tournament in which Sozin introduced his 6. Bc4 (after 1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 c×d4 4. N×d4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6). He didn't get to play it against Botvinnik but won a fine 65-move game from him. However, Botvinnik's victory over Vladimir Alatortsev the next day moved him to within a point and a half of the tournament leader, Riumin.

7th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1931
Botvinnik–Vladimir Alatortsev
E85 King's Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. f3!

"As is known, it is very strong not to develop the queen's knight, but to continue 3. f3! after which Black cannot play the Grünfeld Defense," he wrote at the time. He cor-

rected this view in the 1960s when he wrote, "As is known, the variation 3. ... d5! 4. c×d5 N×d5 5. e4 Nb6, in view of the weakness of the d4-pawn, leads to equal play."

3. ... Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nc3 0–0 6. Be3 e5 7. Nge2 Nc6?!

Black gets counterplay from 7. ... e×d4 8. N×d4 c6 and ... d5.

8. Qd2 Nd7 9. d5 Ne7

White avoided 9. 0–0–0 Nb6 10. b3 e×d4 11. N×d4 a5 with a Black initiative. But Black should have retreated to b8 so the knight will reach c5.

10. g3 f5

Fritz Sämisch made the "Sämisch Variation" known in a 1925 game that continued 10. ... a5 11. Bg2 b6 12. 0–0 Nc5. It took a while before players realized White should play g2–g4! and 0–0–0. And it took a while more for Black to realize he should try ... c6×d5 or ... Nh5 and ... f5.

11. Bg2 f×e4?! 12. f×e4 Nf6 13. h3! b6? 14. b3 Kh8 15. g4! Neg8 16. Ng3 Bd7 17. 0–0–0

White can keep the queenside closed or exploit attempts to open it (17. ... c6? 18. d×c6 and Q×d6). Since he has a winning plan of Qe2 followed by g4–g5 and h3–h4–h5×g6, Black should try for ... b5 counterplay.

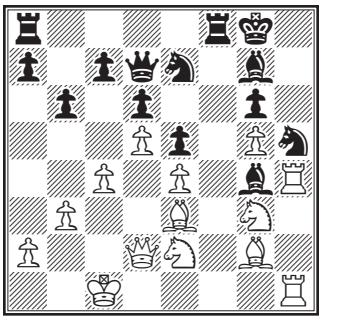
17. ... h6? 18. g5! h×g5

If Black had foreseen White's reply he would have endured 18. ... Nh7!? 19. g×h6 Bf6.

19. h4! Bg4

Or 19. ... g4 20. h5 g5? 21. B×g5 and 22. h6 or just 21. h6.

20. h×g5+ Nh5 21. Nce2 Ne7 22. Rh4 Qd7 23. Rdh1 Kg8 *(diagram)*



After 23. ... Kg8

As Botvinnik would say, the logical conclusion to the game comes on the light squares.

24. R×g4! Q×g4 25. Bh3 Qf3 26. Rf1 N×g3 27. Be6+! 1–0

The check (27. ... Kh8 28. R×f3 R×f3 29. N×g3 R×g3 30. Qh2+) is much faster than 27. R×f3.

Showdown

After five more wins, Botvinnik was set for a showdown with Riumin. Mikhail Yudovich left no doubt for whom the local fans were rooting. "Friends of Riumin, among

whose number I was, advised him to conduct the struggle quietly, not to take risks," he said. "You know you're playing Black," Nikolai Zubarev, a senior Soviet chess official, told Riumin. But it wasn't Riumin's nature to maneuver.

7th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1931
Botvinnik–Nikolai Riumin
D30 Queen's Gambit Declined, Semi-Slav Defense

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. e3 e6 5. Bd3

Botvinnik avoided the topical Meran Variation (5. Nc3 Nbd7 6. Bd3 d×c4 7. B×c4 b5) until he had devised what seemed like its refutation.

5. ... Nbd7 6. 0–0 Bd6 7. Nbd2 e5?

White could now assure a small positional edge with 8. c×d5 c×d5 9. d×e5. Yudovich said Riumin failed to appreciate that it was Botvinnik who needed a win and should be the one complicating.

8. e4! 0–0

It had been known since Chigorin's day that Black is worse if he has to trade on e4, e.g. 8. ... d×e4 9. N×e4 N×e4 10. B×e4 Nf6? 11. B×c6+! b×c6 12. d×e5 or 10. ... e×d4 11. N×d4 0–0 12. Nf5.

9. c×d5 c×d5 10. e×d5 e×d5 11. Ne4

Botvinnik assumed that more symmetry, 11. ... Ne5, would be bad and gave 12. Bg5 Bg4 13. Be2 as favoring White. But 13. ... B×f3 14. B×f3 Be7 is not at all clear.

11. ... N×e4 12. B×e4 Nc5?

Riumin "was a great master of complicated and double-edged setups," wrote Botvinnik. But here he goes astray. Botvinnik thought 12. ... Nf6! would give Black good compensation for a pawn after 13. Q×d4 N×e4 14. Q×e4 Re8 15. Qd4 Bf5. This was borne out in a 1985 game, Averkin–Neverov, which ended in a quick draw after 16. Bg5 Qb6. After 12. ... Nc5?, however, White need not transpose into the above line with 13. Q×d4 N×e4.

13. Bc2! Bg4 14. Q×d4 B×f3 15. g×f3 Re8 16. Rd1

Black's play was revived in a blindfold game, Karpov–Shirov, Melody Amber 1995, which went 16. Be3 Re5 17. Qg4 Nd7 18. f4 Nf6 19. Qf3 R×d5 20. Bb3 Rf5? 21. Q×b7 B×f4 22. B×f7+ Kh8 23. Rad1 Qf8 24. Be6 Rb8 25. Q×a7 Rg5+ 26. Kh1 Ne4 27. Qf7! and White won.

16. ... Re2

"It is obvious that after 16. ... Be5 then 17. Qg4," was Botvinnik's only comment in

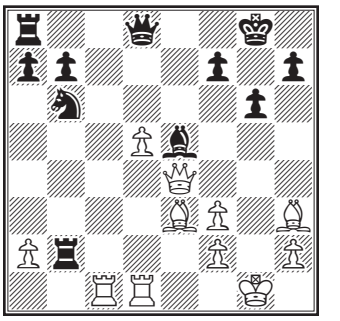
his first game collections, not mentioning 17. Q×c5 Qh4. Khalifman concluded Black is only slight worse after 17. ... Qd6 18. Qh4 g6 19. Rb1 Rac8 20. Be3.

17. Bf5! g6 18. Bh3 Nd7 19. Be3!

"The logical simplicity of play makes (Botvinnik) similar to Capablanca," Grigoriev wrote in *64.* "Riumin, on the other hand, constantly seeks complications in his games and in style approaches Alekhine."

19. ... Be5 20. Qc4 R×b2 21. Rac1?

With a control of 40 moves in two hours, both men were in time trouble. White missed 21. d6!, which Botvinnik considered decisive. It is strong but Black is alive after 21. ... Bg7 22. Qc7? Ne5 or 22. Rab1 Nb6.



After 22. Qe4

21. ... Nb6 22. Qe4 *(diagram)*

Botvinnik's career could have turned out quite differently if Black had found 22. ... Bd6!, preparing 23. ... Rb4! as well as 23. ... R×a2, e.g. 23. Bh6 Rb4! 25. Qe3 Qh4 26. Kg2 Rf4!. As the game goes, White proves what Botvinnik said was known for a long time: "A queen is a bad blockader."

22. ... Qd6? 23. f4! Bg7 24. Bc5 Qd8 25. Be7 Qe8 26. d6!

There's been a dramatic change in three moves (26. ... Bf8 27. Q×b7 R×a2 28. Bh4! and 29. d7!).

26. ... Qb5 27. d7 N×d7 28. B×d7 Qb6 29. Qe3 Q×e3 30. f×e3 R×a2 31. Bc8! h5 32. Rd8+ Kh7 1–0

To Botvinnik, the lesson was: character decided the game. Riumin "loved chess passionately and was of a pleasant nature," he wrote. But at the critical moment, his nerves failed. And as so often happened to Botvinnik's opponents, Riumin fell apart after playing him: He lost his last two games.

Botvinnik clinched first prize with an instructive win against Vladimir Kirillov in the 16th round. His opponent on the last day, Georgy Lisitsyn, came to him before the round and said, "Misha, why don't you make a draw with me? Then I'll receive the master title." Botvinnik's comment is revealing: "At that time I already related to Lisitsyn with respect and decided to make a draw — but so there would be no gossip I didn't give a clear answer." He had a small advantage as White after 30 moves when in a mournful whisper, Lisitysn asked, "Misha, what are you doing?" Botvinnik smiled and offered his hand to the newly minted master. Botvinnik finished in first place by two full points.

Fyodor Bohatyrchuk, who tied for third, saw political implications in his victory. He said it was cherished by the Bolsheviks because Botvinnik was the tournament's only member of Komsomol, which he had joined that year at the Polytechnic. Twenty years later a Soviet biographer, K. Levin, wrote in typical Party prose, "The Komsomol was for him the beginning of the path that led him into the ranks of the party of Lenin-Stalin."

Postgraduate

So, Krylenko reluctantly had his champion. He authorized publication of a tournament book with a staggering 562 pages and a print run of 6,200 copies, edited by Botvinnik, Samuil Vainshtein and Vladimir Nenarokov. Botvinnik annotated about half the games and said he was influenced by Savielly Tartakower's *Die Hypermoderne Schachpartie* and Siegbert Tarrasch's *Driehundert Schachpartien.* "Tarrasch's way of analysis had a strong influence on me and I took over his style," he said. In the tournament book he emphasized "many words, more general ideas, deep analyses and lots of advice to the reader."

Botvinnik became a postgraduate in the Polytechnic's Electro-Mechanical Department in December 1932, while winning his second tournament of the year, the Leningrad Championship. He hinted at his growing authority when he said it was "the first time" — apparently for a Leningrad Championship — that "the participants were given time off from their work.... I insisted on this."

It was also becoming apparent that Botvinnik simply understood pawn structures better than his colleagues. In the early 1930s he mastered the Maróczy Bind and Stonewall formation. Later it would be the pawn chain and doubled pawns of the Winawer Variation of the French Defense. Here's a typical example of his handling of the Bind.

Leningrad Championship 1932
Georgy Lisitsyn–Botvinnik
A30 English Opening

1. Nf3 c5 2. c4 Nf6 3. g3 d5 4. c×d5 N×d5 5. Bg2 Nc6 6. 0–0 e5!

His 7th Soviet Championship game with Kirillov went 1. c4 c5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. g3 d5 4. c×d5 N×d5 5. Bg2 Nc7! — an innovation in place of 5. ... N×c3 — 6. Nf3 Nc6 7. 0–0 e5! 8. b3 Be7 9. Bb2 0–0 10. Rc1 f6. By avoiding a knight trade Black was able to get the upper hand with simple moves such as ... Be6, ... Qd7, ... 0–0, ... Rfd8, ... Rac8 and shifting knights to b4 and d4.

Unable to change the pawn structure, White was helpless and resigned on the 32d move. This should have made a big impression. Yet Botvinnik won a remarkably similar game against Goldberg at the 14th Soviet Championship in 1945.

7. d3 Be7 8. Nbd2?

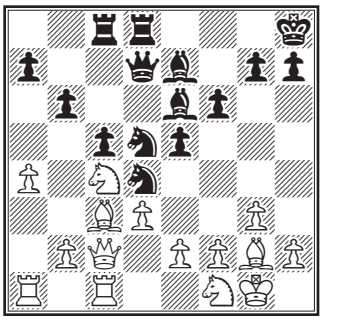
Lisitsyn, too, had not learned from Kirillov–Botvinnik. The knight will accomplish little on c4. Better was 8. Nc3 Be6 9. Ng5! with rough equality after 9. ... B×g5 10. B×d5 B×d5 11. B×g5.

8. ... 0–0 9. Nc4 f6 10. Be3 Be6 11. a4 Qd7 12. Qd2 b6 13. Rfc1 Rac8 14. Qd1 Kh8 15. Bd2

White's last two moves are a confession that he is confined to a constricted position. Compare this with Botvinnik–Fine, Nottingham 1936: 1. Nf3 d5 2. c4 d×c4 3. Na3 c5 4. N×c4 Nc6 5. b3 f6! 6. Bb2 e5 7. g3 Nge7 8. Bg2 Nd5 9. 0–0 Be7 and now 10. Nh4!

0–0 11. Qb1 Rf7 12. Nf5 Be6 13. f4! with good chances. The lesson of these games is that an inferior pawn structure like White's must be changed or Black will maneuver his way to victory.

15. ... Rfd8 16. Qb3 Nc7 17. Bc3 Rb8 18. Qc2 Nd5 19. Nfd2?! Rbc8 20. Nf1 Nd4! *(diagram)*



After 20. ... Nd4

The same ... Nd4, in coordination with ... Nb4, proved strategically decisive against Kirillov and Goldberg. This time Black's goal is to force B×d4 and ... e×d4 and then pound away at e2 and the kingside dark squares.

21. Qd1 Bg4! 22. B×d4 e×d4 23. Qd2 Bf8 24. Re1 Re8 25. h4?

A better way of solving the problem of his f1-knight was 25. e4! d×e3 26. Nf×e3 with some chances of survival.

25. ... Bh3 26. Bf3 Re7 27. Nh2 Rce8 28. Kh1 Be6! 29. b3 Nb4 30. Bg2 Bd5 31. Nf3 Rf7 32. Kh2 Bd6!

Botvinnik had already clinched first place and took his time to aim at g3. He said that after the game a well-known professor and art critic, Nikolai Radlov, complained that he took too long to win. "Brought up in the pre–Revolutionary traditions, he preferred red cavalier attacks to positional trench warfare," Botvinnik wrote.

33. Bh3 Qd8 34. Rab1 Rfe7 35. Ng1 Bc7 36. Na3 Bb7 37. Bg2 B×g2 38. K×g2 Nd5 39. Nc2 Qd6!

Black's winning idea is 40. ... Ne3+! 41. f×e3 Q×g3+ 42. Kf1 d×e3 or 41. Kh1 Ng4 and ... N×f2(+).

40. Na3 Ne3+! 41. Kh1 Ng4 42. Qf4 Q×f4 43. g×f4 N×f2+ 44. Kg2 N×d3 0–1

There was no salvation in 42. Rf1 Qd5+ 43. f3 Ne3 44. Rfc1 B×g3 or 42. Kg2 N×f2 43. K×f2 Q×g3+ 44. Kf1 Re3! preparing ... Qh2 and ... Bg3) 45. Nf3 Qh3+ 46. Kg1 Bh2+ 47. N×h2 Rg3+ and 47. Kh1 Bf4+ 48. Kg1 R3e4!. That finish would have made Radlov happy.

It certainly wasn't clear at the time but this was one of the peaks of Botvinnik's career. A statistical analysis by Charles Sullivan on www.truechess.com ranked the world champions in terms of their best three-year periods. Sullivan found that Botvinnik's peak period ended in 1932 and was exceeded only by Bobby Fischer's 1968, 1969 and 1970.

But it's also remarkable how little Botvinnik played. He may have conducted only 22 serious games in 1932. Half a century later he would express disgust when his teenage students told him how they played 60, 80, 100 clocked games a year. He explained his theory to interviewer Gennady Sosonko: "You will know, after all, that every tenor can hit in his career a certain number of high Cs. But perhaps in chess a player can play only a certain number of good games, and for the rest of the time he simply moves pieces?"

This period of Soviet history was marked by agricultural collectivization, Stalin's brutal efforts to replace family farms with collectives. Botvinnik said little about it in his memoirs but in one of his last interviews he said, "I went hungry again in 1932, during the collectivization of agriculture. But I went to the countryside for a holiday and they had butter there," he said. "I brought back several kilos of butter to my brother and his wife so we ate bread *and* butter for a week."

Chess Propaganda

Botvinnik's final game of 1932, on December 18, was part of chess propaganda: a match between the best Leningrad and Moscow players in which moves were broadcast over the radio with commentary by Nikolai Grekov. In between moves, actors read chess-themed works, such as Alexander Bezymensky's poem *Chess* and excerpts from Ilf and Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs*.

Moscow–Leningrad radio match 1932
Nikolai Riumin–Botvinnik
E35 Nimzo-Indian Defense

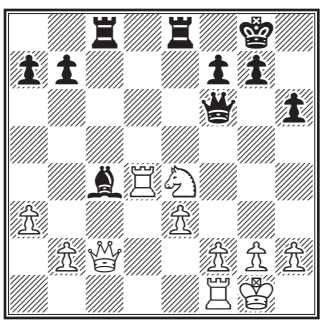
1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. Qc2 d5 5. c×d5 e×d5 6. Bg5 Be6!?

Botvinnik introduced this move three months earlier against Goldberg and got a fine game after 7. e3 Nbd7 8. f4 h6! (9. Bh4 g5! 10. f×g5 Ne4).

7. e3 Nbd7 8. Bd3 h6 9. Bh4 0–0 10. Ne2 c5 11. 0–0 Rc8 12. a3 c×d4

This could have been punished by 13. a×b4! d×c3 14. R×a7.

13. N×d4 Be7 14. Nf5 Nc5 15. N×e7+ Q×e7 16. Bf5 Rfe8 17. Rad1 Nce4?



After 21. N×e4

The right move order was 17. ... g5 18. Bg3 Nce4!. The text allows White to seize an edge with 18. N×d5! e.g. 18. ... R×c2 19. N×e7+ R×e7 20. B×e4 or 19. ... Kf8 20. B×f6 B×f5 21. N×f5 N×f6 22. Nd6.

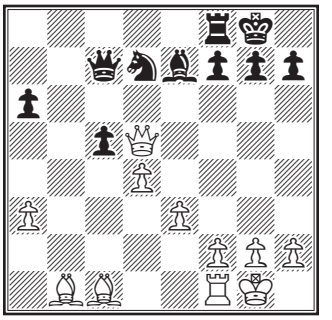
18. B×e4? d×e4 19. B×f6 Q×f6 20. Rd4 Bc4 21. N×e4 *(diagram)* **Q×d4! 22. e×d4 B×f1 23. Nc3**

A queen and a pawn usually balances two rooks. But the presence here of a pair of minor pieces favors White. Botvinnik steers his way to a draw.

23. ... Bc4 24. h3 Red8! 25. Qd2 Rd7 26. d5 Rcd8 27. Qd4 B×d5 28. N×d5 R×d5 29. Q×a7 Rd1+ 30. Kh2 Red7 Draw

Before the 8th Soviet Championship Botvinnik got in two more Leningrad tournaments. In the first, a six-player affair over the 1932-33 winter at the House of Scientists,

he took first place. He lost two games but demonstrated the will to win that his critics had denied seeing in him. *(diagram)*



Alatortsev–Botvinnik,
Leningrad 1932-33
After 20. Bb1

A pawn down and facing two bishops, Black could be expected to play for a draw with 20. ... c×d4 21. e×d4 Nf6 and ... Qd8. Instead he chose what Ragozin called "an objectively bad move," sacrificing a second pawn to retain winning chances.

20. ... c4!? 21. B×h7+? K×h7 22. Qe4+ Kg8 23. Q×e7 c3!

The passed pawn will become crucial after ... c2 and ... Rb8–b1.

24. e4 c2 25. d5?! Rb8 26. g3 Qc8 27. Qg5 Qc4 28. f3 Rb3! 29. Qd2?

If White appreciated how dangerous matters are he would take precautions, as strange as they look, such as 29. Kg2 Rd3 30. Rf2.

29. ... Rd3 30. Qe2 Ne5! 31. Kg2 Rd1! 32. Q×c4 N×c4

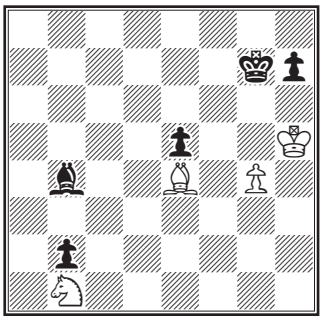
Suddenly the passed pawn and threat of ... Nd2–b3 is winning.

33. d6 Kf8! 34. a4 Ke8 35. Kf2 Nd2! 36. Re1 N×f3! 37. Rf1 N×h2

Black picks up two pawns before winning the bishop. This shows caution — and also an eagerness to reach adjournment.

38. Re1 Nf3 39. Rf1 Nd2 40. Re1 Nb3 41. Ba3 c1(Q) 42. B×c1 R×c1 43. R×c1 N×c1 0–1

In the second Leningrad tournament, in March and April 1933, Botvinnik escaped without a loss. But the only contender he beat was Lisitsyn and he did so luckily. His most impressive feat was saving a lost position *(diagram)*:



Ilyin-Genevsky–Botvinnik,
Leningrad 1933
After 64. ... Kg7

Botvinnik had soundly sacrificed a bishop 40 moves earlier but botched the follow-up. Now White can win if he can (a) free his knight for duty on the kingside, (b) win the h-pawn or (c) create zugzwang. But Black can draw if he can trade kingside pawns or create an impregnable blockade. He doesn't need the e-pawn. It can even hurt him by preventing checks on the long diagonal.

Botvinnik pointed out that the direct 65. Kg5 Be7+ 66. Kf5 Bb4 67. K×e5 doesn't win because of 67. ... Be7! 68. Nd2 h5! 69. g×h5 Kh6 70. Bg6 Bb4! and White cannot break the blockade on h6. But Model showed that passing with 65. Bc2! does the job. On 65. ... Be7 66. Nd2! the knight enters the game. And 65. ... Kg8 66. Kh6! Bf8+ 67. Kg5 Be7+ 68. Kf5 Bb4 69. Kf6! is zugzwang (69. ... Kh8 70. Kf7!).

65. g5? Kg8 66. Kg4 Kg7 67. Kf5 Kf7 68. Bc2 e4!! 69. B×e4 Kg7 70. Ke6 Kg8 71. Kf6 Kh8

White wins after 71. ... Bc5? 72. Nd2 Bd4+ 73. Kf5 Kf7 74. Bb1 Kg7 75. Ne4.

72. Kf7 Be1!

White wanted his pawn at g5 to set up 73. B×h7 K×h7 74. g6+. But now Black would reply 73. ... Bh4! 74. g6 Bf6! 75. K×f6 stalemate. White avoided that finish with 73. Kf6. But he had nothing after 73. ... Bb4! 74. Bd5 Ba5 75. Bc4 Be1 and conceded a draw at move 84.

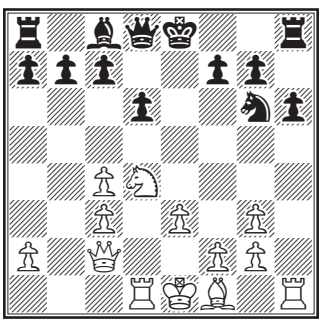
Superiority in adjournment analysis like this was becoming a hallmark of Botvinnik's play. So was preparation of openings.

Leningrad 1933
Botvinnik–Vladimir Nenarokov
A28 English Opening

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. Nf3 Nc6 4. d4

This was the standard way 1. c4 e5 was played until the 1970s, when White realized he should let Black play ... d5.

4. ... e×d4 5. N×d4 Bb4! 6. Bg5 h6 7. Bh4 B×c3+ 8. b×c3 Ne5



After 13. Rd1

Botvinnik later felt this last move could have been punished by 9. f4 in view of 9. ... N×c4 10. e4 Ne3 11. Qe2 N×f1 12. e5. But 9. ... Ng6! 10. B×f6 Q×f6 11. g3 Nf8! and ... Ne6 is fine for Black, as Anatoly Karpov showed.

9. e3 Ng6 10. Bg3 Ne4 11. Qc2 N×g3 12. h×g3 d6 13. Rd1 *(diagram)*

After this game earned considerable attention, Levenfish decided to use Botvinnik's weapon against him. At the "Euwe and Kmoch" tournament a year later, Levenfish

played 13. Be2 and obtained a double-edged game after 13. ... Ne5! 14. Rd1 Qe7 15. Qe4, threatening 16. c5 d×c5 17. Bb5+. Play went 15. ... a6 16. Rh5!? Nd7 17. Qf4 Nf6 18. Ra5!? Bd7 19. g4 Ne4? 20. Bf3 Nc5 21. Nb3 Ne6 22. Qe4! with advantage.

Six years went by and Levenfish decided to try the opening again. This time he was Black and intended an improvement such as 19. ... 0–0!, e.g. 20. g5 h×g5 21. R×g5 Ne4 22. Rh5 g6. But as so often happened, Botvinnik out-prepared a well-prepared opponent. In the interim he realized that ... Ne5 must be stopped. He sprang 13. f4! and after 13. ... Qe7 14. Kf2! Nf8 he had 15. c5! d×c5 16. Bb5+ Nd7 (16. ... c6? 17. N×c6!) 17. Nf5 Qf6 18. Rad1. He seized the initiative and scored his easiest-ever victory over Levenfish (18. ... g6 19. N×h6 Rf8 20. g4 a6 21. g5 Qe6 22. Be2 Nb6 23. Ng4 Ke7 24. Nf6 Qc6 25. Rh7 Bf5 26. e4 Be6 27. f5 1–0).

13. ... Qe7 14. Be2

Here 14. c5? d×c5 15. Bb5+ fails 15. ... Kf8!.

14. ... a6 15. e4 Bd7 16. f4 Rd8 17. Kf2!

This is a fine square for the king, compared with the risky 17. 0–0 h5!.

17. ... Qf6 18. Bf3 Ne7

Black would like to get the knight to c5. But 18. ... Nf8 invites 19. e5 d×e5 20. f×e5. Botvinnik felt Black would just lose a pawn then without compensation. But 20. ... Qb6 21. Rb1 Qc5 is unclear (Khalifman).

19. Qd2 b6 20. g4! g6 21. Rh2!

Simple chess. White can spend the rest of the game targeting h6.

21. ... Qg7 22. Rdh1 f6 23. Nc2 g5 24. Ne3!

Gideon Ståhlberg said of Botvinnik, "His play is without any weak spots whatsoever and he is equally dangerous to adversaries in a long, drawn-out positional struggle as he is in a complicated position where combinational possibilities are complex and so difficult as to be not possible to calculate with any degree of certainty."

Actually Botvinnik — unlike Mikhail Tal, for example — preferred positions he could calculate with certainty, or as he put it, clarity. Here the plan of 24. g3 and planting the knight on f5 is problematic after 24. ... g×f4 25. g×f4 B×g4. That meant White had to calculate 24. Ne3 g×f4 25. Nf5. He could reach clarity if he saw that White wins after 25. ... N×f5 26. e×f5 and Q×f4 or 25. ... Qf7 26. R×h6 R×h6 27. R×h6 Q×c4 28. Rh8+ Ng8 29. Be2! Qc5+ 30. Qd4.

24. ... Be6 25. g3 a5 26. a3 Kd7 27. Qe2

Black, too, has to calculate lines, in particular those with c4–c5 and Qb5+, e.g. 27. ... Rdg8 28. c5 d×c5? 29. f5 Bf7 30. Rd1+ or 28. ... b×c5 29. Qb5+ c6 30. Qb7+. Meanwhile, White prepares for the positional killer, Nf5!.

27. ... Rb8 28. Qd3 Ke8 29. Bd1! Ng6 30. Ba4+ Kf8 31. Kf3! Kg8 32. Qd4 Rf8 33. Nf5! B×f5 34. e×f5 Ne7 35. Bd7! Rh7

Among the ways to lose is 35. ... Kh7 36. Qe3! Ng8 37. Be8! and Bg6+ and 36. ... Rf7 37. Qe6 Kg8 38. Be8.

36. f×g5 f×g5

Or 36. ... Q×g5 37. Rh5 Qg7 38. g5! f×g5 39. Be6+ Kh8 40. R×h6!.

37. Be6+ Rf7 1–0

Black resigned before 38. Q×g7+. Also lost was 37. ... Kh8 38. R×h6!.

Teberda

Botvinnik claimed that during this period his free time was spent on postgraduate studies. "For the study of chess not a single evening was left," he wrote. But thanks to his victory in the winter tournament, he was granted a month-long vacation at a rest home of the Commission for Assistance to Scientists. This was a typical reward in the Soviet era but a first for Botvinnik. The home was at Teberda in the Caucasus Mountains, more than a 1,000 miles from Leningrad. His mother didn't want to let him go because of reports of a typhus outbreak. It was a legitimate fear: The disease had killed journalist John *(Ten Days That Shook the World)* Reed after a trip to Baku 13 years before.

However, Yakov Rokhlin, who would accompany Botvinnik, convinced her that he and Misha would be safe — if they brought powdered naphthalene. He planned to surreptitiously disinfect fellow passengers on the train trip south. "Rokhlin kept his word," Botvinnik wrote. "I died laughing while he sprinkled himself, me and the fellow passengers on the train. He would get into conversation with them, sprinkle the naphthalene into their pockets, while all the time with sincerity he expressed annoyance, along with them, at the unpleasant smell on the train."

After a grueling trip, passing through a famine region — "children who had turned black and wizened kept asking for food" — he and Rokhlin arrived at Teberda. There he enjoyed the mountain air, swimming in the river Teberda, some volleyball, a brief attempt at horseback riding and hobnobbing with other vacationing intellectuals such as the poets Nikolai Aseyev and Semyon Kirsanov. Botvinnik said his only chess work was preparing openings. But as it turned out he never got a chance to play his "Teberda" ideas in the 8th Soviet Championship.

It began August 16, 1933, five days after his 22nd birthday. The rounds were held at Leningrad's Central House of Physical Culture on Khalturin Street, not far from the Hermitage. The players were put up in small private rooms on the third floor, which they reached by walking up a spiral staircase. In their spare time they often socialized together. Fyodor Duz-Khotimirsky was the center of attention, since at age 54 he could recall his pre–Revolution encounters with legends such as Mikhail Chigorin, Akiba Rubinstein and Alexander Alekhine.

After an opening round win from a lost position and then two draws from botched, better positions, Botvinnik won one of his finest games.

8th Soviet Championship, Leningrad 1933
Vsevolod Rauzer–Botvinnik
B74 Sicilian Defense

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 c×d4 4. N×d4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Be2

Rauzer tried to prove 1. e4! wins by force with powerful weapons to beat the Sicilian. But he was years away from introducing 6. Bg5 and his anti–Dragon system with f2–f3, Be3, Qd2 and 0–0–0. As for Botvinnik, databases say the position after 5. ... d6 was new to him.

6. ... g6 7. Be3 Bg7 8. Nb3 Be6 9. f4 0–0 10. 0–0 Na5 11. N×a5 Q×a5 12. Bf3 Bc4 13. Re1 Rfd8 14. Qd2 Qc7 15. Rac1

The rook move looks odd but it wouldn't be bad if prepared with 15. b3.

15. ... e5!

Now 16. f×e5 d×e5 17. Qf2 is nothing much. "Rauzer, probably, anticipated with pleasure the methodical exploitation of the 'fatal' weakness at d6," wrote Ragozin.

16. b3 d5!

This is why 15. b3 was better. Now 17. f×e5 N×e4 and 17. b×c4 d×e4 are fine for Black. Alexey Suetin said 16. ... d5 "is based most of all on intuition."

17. e×d5 e4! 18. b×c4

Albert Becker of Austria, whose 1929 book *Die Sizilianische Partie* remained the foremost analysis of the Sicilian for decades, analyzed the most intricate variation: After 18. N×e4 N×d5! 19. Kh1!— to avoid an immediate loss from 19. ... N×e3 — Black's best is 19. ... N×e3 20. Q×e3 Bd4 21. Qd2 Bb2!. Black can safely grab the Exchange, 22. Qb4 B×c1 23. Nf6+ Kh8! (not 23. ... Kg7?? 24. Qc3!) and win after the remarkable line 24. Qc3 Bd2! 25. Qb2! Be6 26. Nd5+! Bc3! 27. N×c3 Kg8 28. Ne4 Q×f4 29. Nf6+ Kf8.

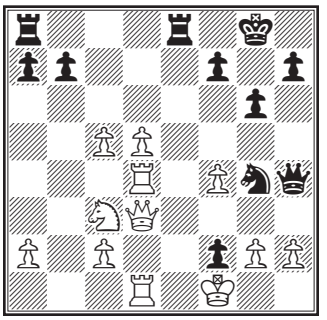
18. ... e×f3 19. c5 Qa5 20. Red1?

After the game, Botvinnik felt 20. Qd3 would favor White, e.g. 20. ... Ng4 21. Ne4 f5 22. Ng5 f2+ 23. B×f2 N×f2 24. K×f2 Q×c5+ 25. Kg3! R×d5 26. Qb3!. But some 30 years later, he concluded 20. ... b6! is at least equal.

20. ... Ng4 21. Bd4?

This loses. White had to try to defend the 21. Ne4 Q×d2 22. B×d2 Bd4+ 23. Kh1 f×g2+ 24. K×g2 R×d5 endgame.

21. ... f2+ 22. Kf1



After 26. ... Re8

Or 22. Kh1 R×d5! 23. N×d5 f1(Q)+ 24. R×f1 Q×d2.

22. ... Qa6+ 23. Qe2 B×d4 24. R×d4 Qf6! 25. Rcd1 Qh4 26. Qd3 Re8 *(diagram)*

The threat of mate (... N×h2, ... Re1+) decides. Salo Flohr of Czechoslovakia recalled seeing this game and being "delighted by the energy, power, complex and exact calculation, depth of strategy and fantasy. I had the feeling that in the Soviet Union they play chess that is somehow different, new, more interesting and deeper than in the West."

27. Re4 f5! 28. Re6 N×h2+ 29. Ke2 Q×f4 0–1

"About ten minutes after Rauzer's resignation I met Botvinnik, whose face showed strong agitation," Romanovsky wrote. "He exclaimed, 'Finally, Pyotr Arsenyevich, I played a game that gave me great satisfaction!'"

Theme Park

By 1933 the Soviet Championship had become a kind of month-long chess theme park. The playing hall accommodated 500 spectators but fans could also follow the games on demonstration boards in the building's left wing or take part in simuls in the foyers. After each game, the winner was expected to comment on it for the spectators. During the tournament an estimated 15,000 fans visited the building on Khalturin.

Riumin was supposed to be Botvinnik's rival for first place. But he couldn't win a single game in the first seven rounds. In his place was Leonid Savitsky, a Romanovsky protégé and newest Soviet master. Botvinnik's 6–1 led him by just a half point so he had to keep winning:

8th Soviet Championship, Leningrad 1933
Botvinnik–Mikhail Yudovich
D96 Grünfeld Defense

1. c4 Nf6 2. d4 g6 3. Nc3 d5 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Qb3 c6 6. c×d5 N×d5 7. Bd2 0–0 8. e4 Nb6?

Black should have traded knights. He never gets enough play from ... Be6 and ... Nc4.

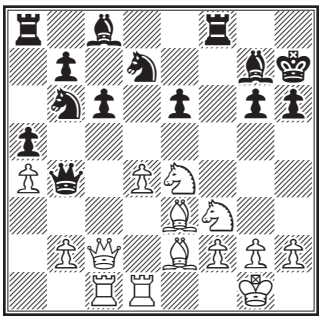
9. Rd1! N8d7? 10. a4! a5 11. Be3 Qc7 12. Be2

Both Black knights are bad (12. ... e5? 13. d×e5 N×e5? 14. B×b6 or 12. ... c5 13. Nb5 Qc6 14. d5 Qf6 15. Rd2). He now prepares ... Qb4! and ... f5.

12. ... Qd6 13. Na2! e6 14. 0–0 h6 15. Rc1 f5 16. Nc3 Kh7 17. Rfd1

White wants to push the d-pawn but 17. d5 f×e4! 18. d×e6 e×f3 fails.

17. ... f×e4 18. N×e4 Qb4? 19. Qc2! *(diagram)*



After 19. Qc2

This was the last Soviet Championship in which the time limits were set by the players, according to Yudovich. He said Grigory Levenfish had convinced the others that a new format, 48 moves in three hours, would allow for the best chess. But, Yudovich added, "In no tournament did I see such 'terrible' time pressure as the 8th Championship."

Botvinnik credited his Teberda rest with allowing him to deal with time pressure better than in the past. He took an hour and 50 minutes for his first 23 moves in this game. But by then it was over.

19. ... Q×a4 20. b3! Qa3 21. Nh4!

The tempting 21. Nfg5+ h×g5 22. N×g5+ is insufficient after 22. ... Kg8 23. Q×g6 Rf6. The text prepares both 22. N×g6! and 22. Ng5+ h×g5 23. N×g6.

21. ... Qe7 22. N×g6! K×g6 23. Bh5+! 1–0

It's mate after 23. ... K×h5 24. Ng3+ Kh4 25. Qe4+ or 23. ... Kh7 24. Nf6+.

The win set up a showdown the next day that proved to be as pivotal as Botvinnik's game with Riumin two years before.

8th Soviet Championship, Leningrad 1933
Leonid Savitsky–Botvinnik
A50 English Opening

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 b6 3. g3 Bb7 4. c4 e5!? 5. d×e5 Ng4

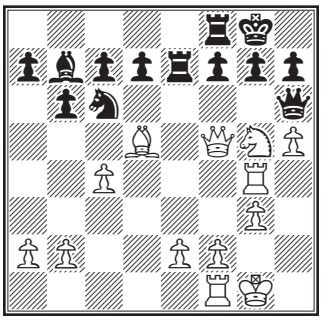
This trappy mixture of Budapest and Queen's Indian Defense was an idea of Alekhine's (6. Qd4 h5! and 7. ... Bc5) and should equalize.

6. Bg2 N×e5 7. Nbd2 Be7 8. 0–0 Ng6? 9. Nb1!

Botvinnik should have traded knights on f3 because now White's knight heads to d5. He alluded to his overconfidence during this era in "My Achievements and Failures" in the June 1933 issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR.* "Mistakes in my games are more than enough," he wrote. This was the politically correct attitude: Soviet thinking emphasized the need for self-criticism as a way of correcting flaws.

9. ... 0–0 10. Nc3 Na6 11. h4! Bf6 12. h5 Ne7 13. Qc2 Nc5 14. Be3 Re8 15. Rad1 B×c3 16. B×c5?! Bf6?!

Black's idea was 16. Q×c3 Nf5 17. Bf4? R×e2. Both players overlooked 16. Ng5 followed by a favorable trade of bishops (16. ... B×g2? 17. Q×h7+). Then Black missed a chance for equality with 16. ... b×c5.



After 22. ... Rf8

17. Bd4 B×d4 18. R×d4 Nc6? 19. Rg4! Qf6! 20. Ng5 Qh6 21. Bd5 Re7 22. Qf5! Rf8 *(diagram)*

Alexander Chistyakov, a professional pianist and strong amateur, showed in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* that White could have won now with 23. Re4! Q×h5 24. Rh4 Qg6 25. Q×g6 h×g6 26. Kg2! followed by Rfh1 and Rh8 mate. White also wins after 23. ... Rfe8 or 23. ... Ree8 (24. Q×f7+!) and following 23. ... R×e4 24. N×f7!.

We don't know how Botvinnik felt at this moment but his hard-won status as a government-favored candidate for the world championship appeared to be hanging by a thread. Mikhail Beilin, a friend, said Botvinnik was never the stoic figure he seemed to be at the board. "His nerves are human, not iron," Beilin said.

Botvinnik's colleagues eventually learned how to detect when he was unhappy with his position. "For example, he begins to straighten his tie," Beilin said. On another occasion a young player, who was playing Botvinnik, told Ilya Rabinovich that he had the advantage. Rabinovich said he knew that without looking at the board. "Botvinnik's ears are red," he explained.

23. Be4? Re5! 24. Q×h7+ Q×h7 25. B×h7+ Kh8 26. Bd3 Nb4 27. f4 Re7

White's edge would vanish after 28. f5! N×d3 but what happens is worse.

28. h6? g×h6 29. Rh4 Kg7 30. Nf3? N×d3 31. e×d3 Re3 32. Nd4 f5! 33. g4 f×g4 34. R×g4+ Kh7 35. Nc2?

White is not quite lost after 35. f5 R×d3 36. Re1!. Time trouble turns the finish into a travesty. The proper end to the game was 35. ... Rh3! 36. Ne1 h5! 37. Rg5 Rh1+ 38. Kf2 R×f4+ 0–1.

35. ... Re2?? 36. Re1?? R×c2 0–1

Botvinnik built up a two-point lead but was exhausted by his 13th round game with Duz-Khotimirsky: "The game was adjourned in a rook ending with three pawns against two pawns on one wing — a clear theoretical draw," he wrote. "But my opponent stubbornly continued play, even when on the board only kings and rooks remained. Only the interference of the tournament committee saved me on the 102nd move from having to continue play." Afterwards he heard that Duz-Khotimirsky wanted to torture him until the 150th move.

"By personal experience I can assert that a chessplayer recognizes tiredness only when he loses a game," he said later. By that token, he should have taken his one-sided loss to Fyodor Bohatyrchuk in the 15th round as a danger sign. He followed that by losing to Riumin in the next round and came close to losing again the next day to the 51-year-old Sergei von Freiman.

Luckily the tournament was nearly over. Draws in the final two rounds clinched first

prize. By then Savitsky had collapsed, scoring only two points in his last eight games en route to 14th place. Like Riumin, Leonid Savitsky never got another chance to become Botvinnik's rival. He died of an incurable heart ailment a year later.

Botvinnik celebrated his victory in a new, never-to-be-repeated way. "I got drunk once on vodka," he said in one of his last interviews, "when I first became Soviet champion. I didn't feel very good afterwards and didn't do it again."

4. Botvinnik vs. the Bourgeoisie

Shortly after the 8th Soviet Championship ended, Botvinnik received an excited phone call from Samuil Vainshtein: There was "important news," he said. "Flohr is suggesting a match with you." This was a bit disingenuous since Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky, serving as counselor to the Soviet embassy in Prague, had already wound up two weeks of negotiations with the Czech grandmaster for a best-of-12-games match.

Salomon (Salo) Flohr was near his peak in 1933. The www.chessmetrics.com site calculates that he was the world's number three player, behind world champion Alexander Alekhine and Isaac Kashdan. During this decade he won 19 of the 39 international tournaments he played in. He was regarded as a wily, mature pro — although at 25, he was just three years older than Botvinnik.

Botvinnik needed approval for the match from Moscow. In particular, he needed the endorsement of Nikolai Krylenko and the Supreme Council of Physical Culture, which had been created by the Central Committee to impose greater discipline on Soviet sport. They had to weigh the risk of losing prestige in what would be the first Soviet-vs.-foreigner test in nearly a decade.

"All the Muscovites were trying hard to convince Krylenko that he should refuse the match and agree to a tournament instead," Botvinnik wrote in *Achieving the Aim.* "All masters were against the match," he added, because they were sure he would lose. But Krylenko "had faith in me."

In "How I Prepared," an article that appeared shortly after the Flohr match, Botvinnik recalled how the Supreme Council freed him from his electrical work. This was another exceptional privilege. "Before the match there were 25 days which I had to use for rest and match preparation," he wrote. He indicated that he was allowed to use the rest home for scientists that was originally the Peterhof Palace, Peter the Great's summer retreat. "First of all I considered it necessary to examine and analyze the most S. Flohr games possible," he wrote. "On the basis of these games I had to draw conclusions about the opponent's style, his technique, his favorite schemes of development, the openings most often chosen." His goal was "to be armed to the teeth in the opening in order to preserve

Salo Flohr (center) demonstrates a position to his opponent, Botvinnik (right), and Botvinnik's mentor, Samuil Vainshtein, during their 1933 match.

strength for the middlegame." This is how any modern grandmaster would approach the task. But it was rare in 1933.

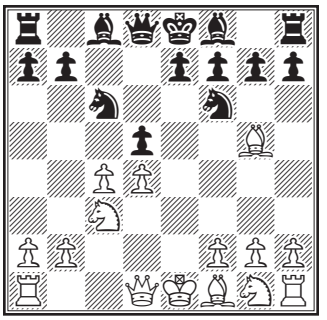
Botvinnik found about 110 Flohr games from six tournament books and other sources. (Today one can find twice as many pre–1934 Flohr games in databases.) He came to a telling conclusion: In 1931 Flohr leaned towards attack and combinations "and in his games the ending was rarely encountered." But the Flohr of 1932-1933 was a quieter player who preferred positional play, exchanges, endgames and trying "to decide a game by bare technique." In the match's second half he exploited another observation: "In relation to psychology Flohr was not very stable."

The importance that the *vlasti* attached to the match was indicated by the venue. It began in the august Hall of Columns of the House of Unions in Moscow. This was the scene of Communist Party Congresses and where Lenin's body had lain in state after his death in 1924. It would be the location for high-profile chess events of the next five decades including the 1946 U.S.–USSR match and the first Anatoly Karpov–Garry Kasparov world championship match.

The players were put up at the National Hotel, the lavish 1903 structure that had fallen into disrepair after the Revolution and had just been remodeled. Play began the second day after Flohr's arrival in Moscow. He had spent more time sightseeing than getting acclimated. It didn't show.

Match, Moscow 1933, first game
Salo Flohr–Botvinnik
B13 Caro-Kann Defense

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e×d5



After 6. Bg5

There is no record of Botvinnik facing 1. ... c6 before yet he was prepared for it. He wrote that he wanted to test "some new ideas in the Caro-Kann that I had already worked out in the summer of 1933 in the Caucasus." In other words, these were unused Teberda ideas.

3. ... c×d5 4. c4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. Bg5 *(diagram)*

Vasily Panov had popularized 3. e×d5 but with 6. Nf3, which appeared — at least in 1933 — to have been neutralized by 6. ... Bg4!. Botvinnik's move threatens 7. B×f6 followed by taking on d5. It had been used by Abram Rabinovich at Carlsbad 1911 and forgotten. Rabinovich got a reasonable Queen's Gambit Declined position by transposition (6. ... e6 7. Nf3 Be7 and ... d×c4). Botvinnik's "Teberda" improvement was 7. c5!?.

6. ... d×c4 7. d5 Ne5 8. Qd4 Nd3+ 9. B×d3 c×d3 10. B×f6?

"In a usual tournament situation, of course, this exchange wouldn't occur to me without some kind of motive," Botvinnik wrote. "White's tenth move is the fruit of inadequately deep home analysis. The thing is, another variation investigated by me, 10. Nf3 e6 11. 0–0–0? Be7 12. R×d3 e×d5!, is favorable to Black and therefore I chose 10. B×f6."

10. ... e×f6! 11. Q×d3 Bd6 12. Nge2 0–0 13. 0–0 Re8!

Black is better, Botvinnik wrote, because of White's clumsy knights, e.g. 14. Ne4 Bf5 and 14. Nb5 Bb8 and 15. ... a6.

14. Rad1 Bg4 15. Rd2 a6 16. Ng3 Rc8 17. h3 Bd7 18. Rfd1 g6!

Black is preparing ... f5! to shut out the knights. He can meet 19. Nce4 favorably with 19. ... Bf4! 20. Rc2 R×c2 21. Q×c2 f5 22. Nc5 Qc8!.

19. Re2 R×e2 20. Ng×e2 f5! 21. Nd4 Qe7 22. Qd2 Re8 23. Nf3 Qf6 24. Re1 R×e1+ 25. N×e1 b5

"Here a pawn attack on the kingside looks very strong. But as strange as it seems, after 25. ... g5 26. Nd3! h6 27. Qe3 b6 28. Kf1 Bc7 29. f4! real chances for attack by Black are not obvious," he wrote. "Therefore Black, with the text move, begins to carry out another plan, consisting of a transfer of the bishop to b7 in connection with ... b5–b4, having the goal of winning the d5 pawn."

26. a3 Kg7 27. Nf3 Bc8 28. Kf1 Bb7 29. b4 Kf8

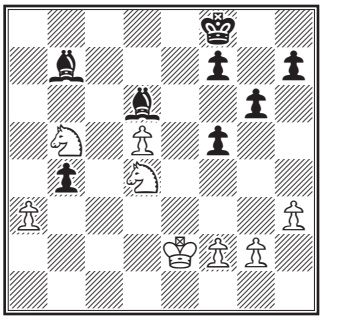
"Black stands somewhat better but a draw is more or less evident. On the immediate 29. ... a5 there would follow, for example, 30. N×b5 Ba6 31. Nfd4 and so on."

30. Ke2?! a5 31. Qd4

Botvinnik later felt 31. N×b5 Ba6 32. Nd4 Qe5+ 33. Kd1 Q×d5 34. N×d6 was right. But short of time, he offered a queen trade that seemed to doom the d-pawn.

31. ... Q×d4 32. N×d4 a×b4 33. Nc×b5? *(diagram)*

Botvinnik overlooks the reply. He would have drawn after 33. a×b4 B×b4 34. Nd×b5 and then 34. ... Ba6 35. Kf3 Ke7 36. h4.



After 33. Nc×b5

33. ... b×a3! 34. N×d6 a2 35. Nc2 Ba6+! 36. Ke3?

White needed to eliminate the a-pawn. Alexander Khalifman gave 36. Kd2 Ke7 37. N×f5+ g×f5 38. Kc3 Bf1 39. g3 B×h3 40. Kb2 f4 41. K×a2 Kd6 42. Nb4 f×g3 43. f×g3 Bg2 44. Kb3 with a likely draw.

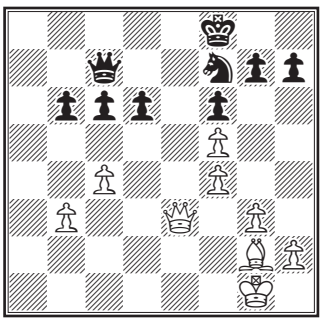
36. ... Ke7 37. N×f7 K×f7 38. Kd4 Bf1 39. h4 B×g2 40. Kc5 f4 0–1

Flohr said the game was marred by "nervousness on both sides.... I won it only thanks to greater experience and tactical preparedness."

During his preparations, Botvinnik concluded that Flohr played the Queen's Gambit and 1. c4 with two or three setups. "That was all of his White openings." But he conceded that Flohr was so good in 1. d4 d5 positions that they should be avoided in favor of the Nimzo-Indian, the Dutch and the Grünfeld defenses. The second match game was, in fact, a Nimzo. After they drew at move 21, Flohr concluded that the position was so bad that either player could "play for a win!"

Having White was more of a problem for Botvinnik. Abram Model "was summoned from Leningrad" before game three but could not solve the Caro-Kann puzzle either. He used his lyrical skill to write a poem that summed up the concern: "The Panov Variation/ is shattered for ever/ And my Mishutka/ sighs in terror/ Will again/ I be beaten?" So Botvinnik switched to 1. d4. As expected, Flohr accepted the Queen's Gambit and played enough "only moves" for another 21-move draw. Botvinnik decided to abandon 1. d4 for the rest of the match.

What was left? He had planned to begin two of his six White games with 1. c4, turning a weapon of Flohr's against him. After a quiet 22-move draw as Black in round four, Botvinnik played 1. c4 the next day, and adjourned with his first real winning chances of the match *(diagram)*.



Botvinnik-Flohr, match, Moscow 1933, fifth game
After 38. ... Nf7

Fans thought 39. Bf3 would begin a slow, winning buildup. But 39. ... d5! would work as in the game.

39. b4?! d5! 40. c×d5 c5! 41. b×c5 b×c5

The c-pawn would give Black the edge after 42. Kf2 c4! 43. Be4 Qa5.

42. Qa3 Nd6 43. Bf1 Kf7 44. Bd3 c4 45. Bc2 c3 46. Qb4!

"After this simple move it becomes evident that Black cannot strengthen his position. The queen must defend the pawn and knight. Of no help is 46. ... Ke7 47. Qd4 with a threat 48. Qe3+," Botvinnik wrote. The rest:

46. ... Nc4! 47. Q×c3 Qc5+ 48. Kh1 Q×d5+ Draw

Botvinnik realized it would take a lot more effort to win a game from Salo Flohr. His deficiencies were clear in the next game, a Krause Variation of the Nimzo in which Flohr traded into a 2B-vs.-2N ending by move 24. Botvinnik offered a draw. "Apparently the endgame carries a drawish character," he wrote, claiming that the bishops only offer "purely practical" chances. That's a strange comment considering what the two bishops meant in the first game. After missing strong defensive means at moves 31 and 50, Botvinnik was in zugzwang by move 53. The Moscow half of the match ended disastrously with his resignation 16 moves later.

On to Leningrad

With the score 4–2, the two men boarded the then eight-hour "Red Arrow" train to Leningrad that Capablanca had taken eight years before. Flohr nervously "walked to and fro" during the ride and wanted to change seats. "You are in seat number 13, my lucky number," he explained. Botvinnik refused. "I, too, am superstitious," he said.

In Leningrad they were to be put up in the Astoria Hotel, next to the iconic St. Isaac's Cathedral and not far from the playing site, the Great Hall of the Leningrad Conservatory. Botvinnik was assigned a "large, cold and somewhat uncomfortable room." So he went back to Nevsky Prospekt, 88. In *Achieving the Aim* he described his family apartment as a "large communal flat, seven families sharing" and with "a narrow ten-meter room" that was so small that when he did his morning Müller exercises he had "to stand sideways." But it was home.

Flohr was impressed by the status of chess in the Soviet Union. During one of the match evenings the players were invited to the ballet and sat in the "government box." After the second act, the conductor announced that the chess champions of the USSR and Czechoslovakia were in the audience. That was greeted with thunderous applause. But Flohr was less impressed by his opponent. In the Czech newspaper *Narodni Listy*, he dismissed Botvinnik as "an extraordinarily likeable youth, who from the very beginning was convinced the match was lost." How Botvinnik felt is not clear but he joked about his awful start half a century later:

In 1983 his protégé, Garry Kasparov, was highly favored in a Candidates match in London with Viktor Korchnoi. But Kasparov lost the first game and became upset. Then he got an unexpected phone call from Moscow, according to journalist Valery Asrian.

"Do you remember the events of 50 years ago?" Botvinnik asked.

"In 1933 you played a match with Flohr," Kasparov replied.

"And how did the struggle go?"

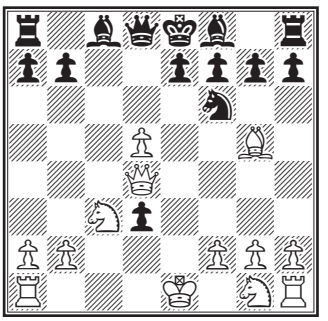
"You lost the first and sixth games and got revenge in the ninth and tenth."

"So you see what a favorable situation you're in," Botvinnik said. "You didn't lose the sixth game yet!"

This had the desired effect. Kasparov regained his composure, won the next game and then the match, en route to the world championship.

Botvinnik's fortune began to change when Vyacheslav Ragozin joined his team in Leningrad and lobbied in favor of trying 1. e4 again. "Misha, the opening variation of the first game is very good," he said. "You just went wrong." But after several hours of analysis they still couldn't come up with anything concrete against the Caro-Kann.

So Botvinnik repeated 1. c4 in game seven. The draw they agreed to at move 24 left him two points down with five games to play and forced to seek complications. But Flohr began the next game 1. d4 e6 2. e4! and Botvinnik had nothing better than 2. ... d5 3. Nd2 c5. That allowed a quick queen trade, 4. e×d5 e×d5 5. Bb5+ Bd7 6. Qe2+ Qe7, and another draw. Fortunately, the rules provided for a two-day break after the eighth game. That gave Team Botvinnik time to finish repairing the Panov Variation *(diagram)*.



Botvinnik-Flohr, match, Leningrad 1933, ninth game
After 9. ... c×d3

10. Nf3! g6

Botvinnik was ready to meet 10. ... e6 not with 11. 0–0–0, as he analyzed at Teberda, but with 11. B×f6! Q×f6 12. Q×d3, with a lead in development.

11. B×f6 e×f6 12. 0–0 Qb6

After the game, Botvinnik felt Black was already lost, e.g. 12. ... Be7 13. Rad1! 0–0 14. R×d3 threatens 15. d6. Then 14. ... Bf5 15. Rd2 Bd6 16. g4! Bc8 17. Ne4 is very strong. That's why Flohr abandons castling here. "But, alas, in an open position with a completely undeveloped army, play similar to the spirit of W. Steinitz cannot save the game," Botvinnik wrote.

13. Rfe1+ Kd8

"Obviously this is the strongest move," Grigory Levenfish was saying in the press room about 14. Qd4. Instead of regaining the pawn on d3, the queen move would threaten 15. Ne5! Qc7 16. d6! B×d6 17. Nb5. White could meet 14. ... Be7 with 15. d6 Q×d6 16. Rad1! Bf5 17. Nd4 or 16. ... Bd7 17. Re3. "But will Botvinnik really decide on such a move?" Levenfish added, indicating he didn't think so.

14. Qh4! g5!? 15. Qh5 Bd6 16. Q×f7 Rf8 17. Q×h7 g4!

Black needs complications, as in 18. Nh4 d2! 19. Red1 Q×b2.

18. Nd2! Qc7 19. Qh6! Qf7 20. Nc4

Black's next move was "desperation," Botvinnik wrote. But 20. ... Bb4 21. a3 B×c3 22. Nd6! Qg8 23. b×c3 was also lost.

20. ... Be5 21. N×e5

Siegbert Tarrasch showed that 21. Nb5! would win faster, e.g. 21. ... d2 22. R×e5! f×e5 23. Qd6+ Bd7 24. Qc7+ Ke7 25. Q×e5+ Kd8 26. Qc7+ Ke7 27. Qc5+ Kd8 28. Ncd6. But Botvinnik had become a pragmatist. "If I had to play White again in this position I would play the second time as in the game, since in an elementarily won position each master must choose the simplest path," he wrote.

21. ... f×e5 22. Qg5+ Qe7 23. Q×e5 Q×e5 24. R×e5

Four decades later, Botvinnik, in his commanding baritone voice, would ask talented students in his school, "How did Capablanca realize an advantage of an extra pawn?" When no one in the class dared answer, Botvinnik gave them the one he wanted: "He waited for his opponent to blunder a second pawn!" In other words, a one-pawn edge is often insufficient to win. But two pawns almost always is.

Where did this advice originate? In *Analytical,* he recalled Capablanca commenting during Moscow 1936, "When you are a pawn up, you should not hurry but should wait for the opportunity to win a second pawn." Here he plays à la Capa.

24. ... Bf5 25. Rf1! Kd7 26. f3! b5 27. f×g4 B×g4 28. h3 b4 29. Ne4! R×f1+ 30. K×f1 Rf8+ 31. Ke1 Bf5 32. g4 Bg6 33. Re6 1–0

Flohr blamed his loss on not finding an answer to 10. Nf3. Yet he had no excuse for the tenth game, "one of the weakest games of my chess career." But Botvinnik had an explanation: Before the match he concluded that Flohr would be psychologically vulnerable after a loss. On the advice of Model and Ragozin, he tried the Stonewall Dutch.

Match, Leningrad 1933, tenth game
Salo Flohr–Botvinnik
A95 Dutch Defense

1. d4 e6 2. c4 f5 3. g3 Nf6 4. Bg2 Be7 5. Nc3 d5 6. Nf3 c6 7. 0–0 0–0 8. b3 Qe8 9. Bb2 Nbd7 10. Qd3

If White was playing for a draw, he could have eliminated most of Black's kingside

attacking chances with 10. Ng5 and 11. f4!. And if he understood the opening better he might have tried 10. e3 and Ne2–f4.

10. ... Qh5 11. c×d5? e×d5 12. Nd2?! Ne4 13. f3 N×c3 14. B×c3 f4!

Now 15. g×f4 Bd6 allows Black an easy attack.

15. Rfe1 Bd6 16. Nf1 Rf7!

This frees f8 for a knight maneuver to h4 and is better than 16. ... Nf6 17. Bd2! f×g3 18. h×g3, when White's bishop becomes a fine defensive piece.

17. e3 f×g3 18. N×g3

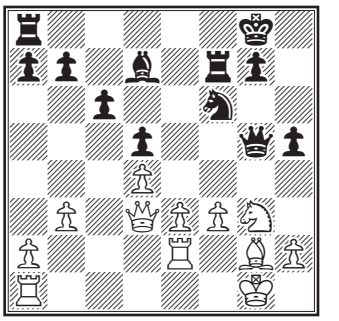
Botvinnik thought that 18. h×g3 was refuted by 18. ... R×f3. But 19. B×f3 Q×f3 20. Qe2 Q×e2 would be unclear, according to Flohr. Better is 18. ... Qg5! 19. f4 Qh5 and ... Nf6–g4.

18. ... Qh4 19. Nf1 Nf6 20. Re2 Bd7 21. Be1 Qg5 22. Bg3 B×g3

Now 23. h×g3 Nh5 24. Kh2 N×g3! 25. K×g3 Qh4+ or 24. g4 Nf6 and ... h5.

23. N×g3 h5! *(diagram)* **24. f4 Qg4 25. Rf2 h4 26. Bf3**

"An obvious oversight," wrote Botvinnik, who added that 26. h3! Qe6 27. Nf1 Ne4 was also lost (and better than 26. ... Q×g3 27. Rf3).



After 23. ... h5

26. ... h×g3! 27. B×g4 g×f2+ 28. Kg2 N×g4 29. h3 Nf6 30. K×f2 Ne4+ 0–1

After Flohr saw the hopelessness of 31. Kg2 B×h3+! and resigned, the audience cheered his name and Botvinnik's for a quarter of an hour, he said. The match was tied.

The final games were drawn in 26 and 22 moves. In fact, a draw was agreed in advance of the last game, by an offer Flohr passed through Samuil Vainshtein, according to Botvinnik. "Of course, I did not object," he wrote. "Could I have dreamt of a drawn match on the eve of the ninth game?" Flohr made no mention of the deal but said taking risks in such a short match made no sense. After all, "victory by the advantage of one point would be hardly convincing." The practical effect of the result, Botvinnik wrote, was that following the match, "Soviet players began meeting their foreign colleagues with greater frequency." That is, Krylenko and the *vlasti* were more confident that their players wouldn't embarrass the USSR. For his part, Krylenko said that in the match Botvinnik was "displaying the qualities of a true Bolshevik."

There was also a match postmortem at the Leningrad House of Scientists. Botvinnik said he heard from friends that his critics planned to attack him. Levenfish and Romanovsky had praised Flohr in the first half, he said. But they turned around in the second half to say Botvinnik should have won the match. Botvinnik handled this confrontation the way he would so many: He prepared. When he got his chance to speak, he

reminded the audience that nine years before Romanovsky had been crushed in a match with Yefim Bogolyubov. "Pyotr Arsenyevich, it would seem that you played correctly then from a creative point of view," he said, then added. "What sort of shape would Soviet chess be in now if I had played against Flohr à la Romanovsky?"

Ganochka

Returning to his studies, Botvinnik played only two games in the next eight months. He twice beat a fellow electrical engineer and chess master, Sergei Belavenets, in a Leningrad–Moscow match on May 1–2, 1934. It was on May 1 that his life changed once more because of Yakov Rokhlin. Botvinnik was invited to his mentor's home on Leningrad's Vasilievsky Island, a fashionable area across the Neva river from the Winter Palace.

"My friend had already married the young ballet soloist Valentina Lopukhinoi. I was late," he wrote. "Everyone was already gathered. I sat on a chair, glanced at the neighbor to the right and — was stunned."

The neighbor was Gayane Ananova, a 19-year-old ballerina with jet black hair. She was descended from survivors of a massacre of Armenians. Like Botvinnik, she was a cultural star who had grown up in Leningrad. She had attended the Choreographic College and elite Vaganova College (now the Academy of Russian Ballet) where she studied under the legendary Agrippina Vaganova. Gayane had been performing for two years, and appeared in Kirov Opera and Ballet Company productions of *Swan Lake, Solveig, Sleeping Beauty* and other classics. In fact, she had danced at the Mariinsky Theater on Theater Square, next door to site of the Flohr match.

Botvinnik was instantly smitten. He walked home across one of the Neva bridges in pouring rain. "I went home on Nevsky fascinated by this surprising and somewhat puzzling girl," he recalled.

"By character they were absolutely opposites," their only child, Olga, recalled in 2012. Gayane was religious, while Botvinnik was fond of saying, "I am an atheist and a communist in the spirit of the first communist on earth, Jesus Christ." She was a gentle spirit. He reveled in his "hard character." She was apolitical. He was an ardent Marxist. As time went by, she found it hard to deal with the stress that he seemed to thrive on.

Yuri Averbakh said Gayane had one other not-unimportant attribute: She was the daughter of David Ananov, a professor of descriptive geometry, and a niece of Professor Pavel Kalantarov. Both were from the Polytechnic, where Botvinnik would have to defend his dissertation.

The couple waited until April 1935 to marry. Even Capablanca gave his blessing, Botvinnik said. "A month before our marriage, Capa, having seen my betrothed in the loge of the Kirov Theatre, gave his evaluation: '*Et bonne, et belle*'" — that is, "Good and pretty." They got an apartment at Ulitza Tchaikovskovo, 10, with his mother, who became close to Ganochka, as he called her. She devoted herself to her new family while her husband "considered it necessary to serve society," as historians Vladimir and Isaak Linder put it.

The participants of the Leningrad 1934 tournament analyze a position. Seated (left to right): Vladimir Alatortsev, Hans Kmoch, Grigory Levenfish, Ilya Rabinovich, Grigory Lisitsyn, Max Euwe and Vitaly Chekover. Standing (left to right): Mikhail Yudovich, Pyotr Romanovsky, Ivan Golubev (arbiter), Nikolai Riumin, Ilya Kan, Botvinnik.

Euwe and Kmoch

On Botvinnik's 23rd birthday he began his first tournament in a year. Max Euwe and his second Hans Kmoch were visiting the USSR to train for Euwe's impending world championship match. A round robin was organized in Leningrad, dubbed the "Tournament with the Participation of Euwe and Kmoch." Euwe was particularly impressed with this game, which he included in his classic textbook *Judgment and Planning in Chess.*

"Tournament with the Participation of Euwe and Kmoch"
Leningrad 1934
Botvinnik–Hans Kmoch
B14 Caro-Kann Defense

1. c4 c6 2. e4

Botvinnik had learned about move order finesses. Here he avoids the Slav Defense (2. d4 d5) and reaches the Panov Attack.

2. ... d5 3. e×d5 c×d5 4. d4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. Bg5 e6 7. c5! Be7 8. Bb5

This was more Teberda analysis. White will pressure the a4–e8 diagonal and win e5 as an outpost for his knights.

8. ... 0–0 9. Nf3 Ne4! 10. B×e7 N×e7 11. Rc1 Ng6 12. 0–0 Bd7 13. Bd3! f5?

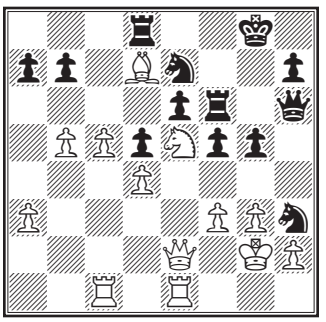
In this game Kmoch originated the simplifying 9. ... Ne4 idea that later came into fashion. But he converted the position into a Stonewall formation with a bad bishop. Better was 13. ... N×c3 followed by ... Nf4.

14. b4 Be8 15. g3! Rc8 16. Re1 Qf6 17. a3 Ne7 18. Ne5 Qh6?

Better was 18. ... Nc6 19. N×c6 B×c6 so that 20. Ne2 e5 offers play. Now White can aim at creating a winning, passed queenside pawn.

19. f3 Nf2 20. Qe2! Nh3+ 21. Kg2

Black's knight probe failed when White rejected 20. K×f2? Q×h2+ 21. Ke3 f4+ with a perpetual check. Now 21. ... Ng5 22. h4 and 23. b5 favors White.



After 25. b5

21. ... g5 22. Nb5 B×b5 23. B×b5 Rf6

Or 23. ... Nc6 24. B×c6! b×c6 25. a4, followed b4–b5.

24. Bd7 Rd8 25. b5 *(diagram)*

And here 25. ... Ng6 26. N×g6 R×d7 allows 27. c6! b×c6 28. b×c6 Rc7 29. Qb2! and Qb8+ wins.

25. ... Qh5 26. c6 Rh6 27. Kh1 1–0

"Commenting on this game, Kmoch wrote that in chess Botvinnik sees everything and also a little more," the winner said in *Analytical.* "He had many opportunities of going wrong, and on several occasions he had to find just the right move to withstand Black's kingside attack," Euwe said, citing 15. g3, 20. Qe2 and 27. Kh1.

Botvinnik's performance, in what was considered his second international test, was endangered when he developed a fever of 102 degrees. He was diagnosed with a parathyroid disease. Yet he didn't drop out. Instead, he was allowed a six-day break that required considerable juggling of the playing schedule. Would this treatment have been offered to one of the lesser Soviets in the tournament? Perhaps not. But as Botvinnik said on other occasions, "They are not Botvinnik."

Euwe, who had been injured while swimming in the Black Sea during a visit to Yalta, lost twice. This allowed Botvinnik to clinch first place with a last-round draw against Nikolai Riumin. He had passed another exam in his bid to become the Soviet candidate for the world championship.

Hastings

According to the Stalinist motto, the Soviet people must "catch up with and surpass the West." Botvinnik concluded that the Flohr match showed that they had caught up in chess. But surpassing "the representatives of bourgeois art," he wrote in "How I Prepared," would require deep study. He added that it was "very difficult to judge the strength" of foreign players just by their published games. This was evident when he traveled to his

first overseas tournament — or as the Soviet press called it, his first "bourgeois tournament," Hasting 1934-35.

No player who had grown up in the Soviet Union had ever played in a foreign international, so special preparations were necessary. The Leningrad City Council outfitted Botvinnik with two suits to make a good impression. Samuil Vainshtein agreed to travel with him on an exhausting train ride across Europe, then a boat from Ostend to Dover, and another train to Hastings. They arrived just two hours before the first round. When Emanuel Lasker, a veteran of more than forty years of international tournaments, heard this, he shook his head and told Botvinnik, "For acclimatization you should have arrived about ten days before."

An experienced player like Flohr could have dealt with such a lack of rest before play began. But Botvinnik would have been the first to admit he needed calm and a clear mind to play good chess. A first-round draw with Flohr was followed by losses to Euwe and Sir George Thomas. Andre Lilienthal of Hungary, who met Botvinnik at the tournament, offered an excuse for the "pleasant young man in glasses with an intelligent face." Botvinnik was being housed in a "not very comfortable hotel," he said, while Capablanca, Flohr and other contestants were in "the best hotel in Hastings."

Botvinnik clawed back to an even score with a New Year's Day win over Philip Stuart Milner-Barry — who was to become one of the famed chess-playing British codebreakers during World War II — and a defeat of the women's world champion.

Hastings 1934-35
Botvinnik–Vera Menchik
D37 Queen's Gambit Declined

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 d5 4. Nf3 Nbd7 5. Bf4!?

This is another opening move with a dubious reputation that Botvinnik turned into a weapon. Theory endorsed 5. c×d5 e×d5 6. Bf4 instead because now Black obtains better pawns and the two bishops.

5. ... d×c4 6. e3 Nd5 7. B×c4 N×f4 8. e×f4 Bd6 9. g3 0–0 10. 0–0

But White's greater space and use of e5 more than compensate. Akobian–Seirawan, U.S. Championship 2012 went 10. ... b6 11. Re1 Bb7 12. d5!? e×d5 13. B×d5 B×d5 14. Q×d5 Nf6 15. Qc6 Qd7 16. Q×d7 N×d7 17. Nb5 Nf6 18. Rac1 Rfc8 19. Rc6 with advantage.

10. ... Nf6 11. Qe2 b6

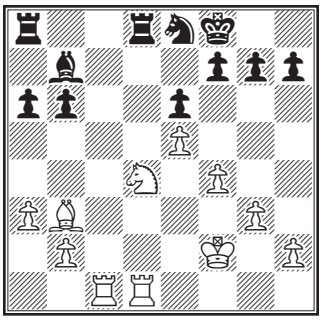
Botvinnik had gotten an edge against Ragozin in the 1930-31 Leningrad Championship after 11. ... a6 12. Rfd1 b6 13. Rac1 Bb7 14. Bd3 Qe7 15. Ne4 Rfd8 by means of 16. N×f6+! Q×f6 17. Be4! B×e4 18. Q×e4. Ragozin should have gone into an ending (18. ... Qf5) or defended with 18. ... g6 and ... Kg7. But he played 18. ... c5? 19. Ne5 c×d4 20. R×d4 Bc5? and soon blundered, 21. Rd7! Qf5 22. Qb7 Rab8 23. Qf3 f6? 24. g4! 1–0.

12. Rfd1 Bb7 13. Rac1 Qe7 14. a3 Rfd8 15. Ne5 c5 16. Nb5! c×d4 17. N×d4 B×e5?

Black had to meet Nec6. Botvinnik claimed a White initiative after 17. ... Bc5 18. Nec6 B×c6 19. N×c6 R×d1+ 20. R×d1 Qc7 21. Ne5.

18. Q×e5 Qd6 19. Bb3!

The threat is N×e6 now that ... Q×d1+ doesn't work. And 19. ... Bd5 would be met by 20. Nc6! Q×e5 21. f×e5 Re8 22. Ba4, with a bind.



After 22. ... Kf8

19. ... Q×e5 20. f×e5 Ne8

Botvinnik said c7 and d6 had to be watched but 20. ... Ng4 21. f4 Ne3 might have been better.

21. f4 a6 22. Kf2 Kf8? *(diagram)*

With 22. ... Bd5 23. B×d5 R×d5 24. Nc6! R×d1 25. R×d1 Kf8 Black is worse but not yet lost. Now 23. B×e6 R×d4! 24. R×d4 f×e6 is sharper than Black deserves.

23. f5! Bd5

Too late. On 23. ... e×f5 White has 24. e6! f6 25. N×f5 or 24. ... Bd5 25. e7+ K×e7 26. N×f5+ Ke6 27. R×d5! R×d5 28. Ne3 and wins.

24. f×e6 B×b3 25. e7+! 1–0

In view of 25. ... K×e7 26. Nc6+.

Botvinnik said little about the tournament in his memoirs. But in the bulletins of Moscow 1935, Samuil Vainshtein wrote: "The champion of the USSR Botvinnik was the 'sensation' of the tournament.... Of him they wrote that he resembles an Oxford University student, that he has refined manners, that he conducts himself as a 'gentleman.' We were representatives of that Great country that even long ago was considered the 'Chess Eldorado.'" The tournament "ended not as we expected but still fully satisfactorily."

In the foreword to the English edition of *Half a Century of Chess*, Botvinnik gave a more honest evaluation: "Alas, I was not very successful." He even drew with 61-year-old Reginald Pryce Michell, who had played in the amateur tournament of Hastings 1895.

With two games left, one of them as Black with Capablanca, Botvinnik was at risk of a humiliating minus score. Such a setback that would all but wipe out the political capital he earned from the Flohr match and the Euwe and Kmoch tournament. It might have cost him the patronage of Krylenko. But in the next game:

Hastings 1934-35
Botvinnik–George Norman
E72 King's Indian Defense

1. c4 Nf6 2. d4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. g3 0–0 6. Bg2 Nc6 7. Nge2 Bd7?! 8. h3 h6?! 9. Be3 a6 10. Qd2 Kh7 11. f4!

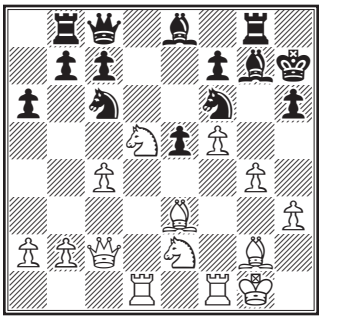
Black's delay in contesting the center hands White a clear edge.

11. ... Ng8 12. 0–0 e5 13. d×e5 d×e5 14. f5! g×f5

It's hard to suggest improvements since Black faced 15. g4 and a buildup with Ng3, Nd5, Rf2, and Raf1.

15. e×f5 Rb8? 16. Rad1 Nf6 17. Nd5 Be8 18. Qc2

White can win the Exchange and force an endgame with 18. Bc5 Rg8 19. Be7! because of 19. ... N×e7 20. N×f6+ B×f6 21. Q×d8. But it's easier to win such a powerful position in the middlegame.



After 19. ... Rg8

18. ... Qc8 19. g4 Rg8 *(diagram)* **20. g5! 1–0**

Black saw 20. ... h×g5 21. B×g5 was hopeless (21. ... N×d5 22. f6+). A well-fought Dutch Defense with Capablanca enabled the Soviet champion to leave England with a modest 5–4 score and a tie for fifth place.

The official Soviet view was reflected by the *Shakhmatny Yezhegodnik*, or "Chess Yearbook," that appeared in 1937: Botvinnik "could not overcome the unpleasant influence of the atmosphere of a bourgeois tournament." His result was "completely accidental." It didn't take long for him to recover from the accident.

5. Two Moscows and a Nottingham

One game more than any other made Mikhail Botvinnik famous. But it was over so quickly that many of the 4,000-plus fans who showed up for the opening round of Moscow 1935 didn't immediately realize what happened. One of them was Boris Vainshtein. He arrived 40 minutes after the games began at the playing site, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Art. He looked at the stage and noticed that two players were missing. He was puzzled: The demonstration board of the finished game showed Black was a pawn ahead. But a sign read "White won."

Moscow 1935
Botvinnik–Rudolph Spielmann
B13 Caro-Kann Defense

1. c4 c6 2. e4 d5 3. e×d5 c×d5 4. d4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. Bg5 Qb6?

"During the trip from Warsaw to the Russian border one of the foreign journalists told me under the strictest secrecy that he had found a complete refutation of Botvinnik's favorite variation in the Caro-Kann Defense," Rudolph Spielmann recalled. "The journalist was so insistent that I was convinced as if hypnotized." Spielmann said he rewarded the journalist with a bottle of wine. After arriving in Moscow he was delighted to find, during the drawing of lots, that he would get a chance to use his secret weapon in the first round.

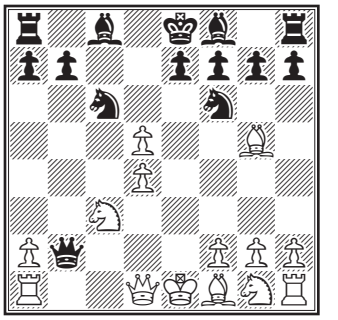
7. c×d5

Spielmann first took notice of 6. ... Qb6 a year before when Josef Rejfiř played it against him at Maribor 1934. After Spielmann continued 7. c5?, he was surprised by 7. ... Q×b2 8. Nge2 Bf5! and had nothing better than a lost endgame after 9. Qc1 Q×c1+ 10. R×c1 0–0–0. Rejfiř subsequently wrote an article about 6. ... Qb6 and the journalist improved on it. But Botvinnik had also seen the article and worked out *his* improvements. In the 1930s a world-class player like Spielmann might briefly analyze a move for a particular opponent and then forget about it. In contrast, Botvinnik expected opponents to

have improvements in every game. By anticipating them he was able to stay months, if not years, ahead of his rivals.

7. ... Q×b2? *(diagram)*

After this game, analysts tried to save 6. ... Qb6 with 7. ... N×d4 and the wild complications of 8. Be3 e5 9. d×e6 Bc5! 10. e×f7+ Ke7. But then 11. Bc4 Q×b2 12. Nge2! was found, e.g. 12. ... Nc2+ 13. Q×c2! Q×a1+ 14. Bc1 and wins, or 13. ... Q×c2 14. B×c5+ Kd7 15. Rd1+. To make the variation playable, Black has to try 7. ... N×d5 and 8. N×d5 Qa5+ 9. Nc3 Q×g5 10. Nf3 Qf4 11. d5 Ne5. But it's no more than playable.



After 7. ... Q×b2

8. Rc1!

When the journalist showed Spielmann his analysis, they saw 8. Na4 and 8. ... Qb4+ 9. Bd2 Q×d4 10. d×c6 and 10. ... Ne4 11. Be3 Qb4+ 12. Ke2. This looks bad for White in view of 12. ... Q×a4 13. Q×a4 Nc3+ 14. Ke1 N×a4, which regains the piece. But this is refuted by 15. Bb5! followed by 16. B×a4 or 16. c×b7+ and 17. b×a8(Q).

Spielmann wasn't counting on 12. ... Q×a4 but rather 12. ... b×c6!. Then the ... Ba6+ threat would prompt 13. Rc1 Qb5+ 14. Ke1 Qb4+ with a draw. Not a bad way to start a tournament as Black. And 14. Kf3?? Qh5+! 15. K×e4 Bf5+ 16. Kf4 e5+ would be even better. But after 8. Rc1! Spielmann "saw to my extreme surprise that my queen was irretrievably lost."

8. ... Nb4

Black loses quickly after 8. ... Na5 9. Qa4+ and 8. ... Nb8 9. Na4 Qb4+ 10. Bd2 Q×d4 11. R×c8+. Only a bit better is 8. ... Nd8 9. B×f6 e×f6 10. Bb5+ Bd7 because White has 11. Rc2! Qb4 12. Qe2+! Be7 13. B×d7+ K×d7 14. Qg4+ Ke8 15. Q×g7 or 12. ... Qe7 13. d6! Qe6 14. d5. White also wins after 10. ... Ke7 11. Rc2 Qb4 12. Qe2+.

9. Na4 Q×a2 10. Bc4 Bg4 11. Nf3 B×f3 12. g×f3 1–0

Black can save his queen at the cost of a piece, 12. ... Qa3 13. Rc3 Nc2+. Botvinnik said he took only 20 minutes for the entire game.

At the first Moscow international ten years before, "almost all of the Soviet participants were masters of pre–Revolution formation," as the 1937 *Yezhegodnik* put it. And it was obvious then that, with the exception of Yefim Bogolyubov, they lagged far behind the West. A new generation was needed and Moscow 1935 was designed to test it. Twelve Soviet players were invited, including several examples of the "New Soviet Man" that was the Communist ideal. No one fit the description better than Botvinnik.

Among the eight invited foreigners was Andre Lilienthal, who had been born in Moscow three months before Botvinnik but had blossomed into a master in Hungary. He recalled Moscow 1935 as a luxury: "The participants were put up in one of the best hotels, the National. My room had a view of the Kremlin. The food was superclass. Red and black

caviar, wine, vodka as much as you want." Botvinnik, however, was strictly business. He had set for himself a rigid regimen that required, for example, a brisk 15-minute walk to the playing site just before each round. He was ten minutes late for his second round game with Capablanca because he had forgotten the eyeglasses he relied on for tournament games and had to hurry back to the hotel. But since the Cuban had begun wearing glasses himself during games, he was mollified. Their game was an uneventful draw in 24 moves.

Botvinnik had a relatively easy time the next three days with wins over Vera Menchik, Pyotr Romanovsky and Grigory Levenfish. His next victim was Nikolai Riumin, who was no longer considered a rival.

Moscow 1935
Nikolai Riumin–Botvinnik
C86 Ruy Lopez

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0–0 Be7 6. Qe2 b5 7. Bb3 d6 8. c3 0–0 9. d4 Bg4 10. Rd1

This line came into fashion after Emanuel Lasker introduced it at St. Petersburg 1909. Black can equalize with vigorous center play.

10. ... e×d4 11. c×d4 d5! 12. e5 Ne4 13. h3 Bh5 14. a4? b4 15. a5

White's only chance for advantage lay in trading off the Black knight with Nc3. Therefore his 14th move was "simply bad," Botvinnik said. Yet Riumin's play has some logic to it — stopping ... Na5!, for example — and would yield a clear edge if he could carry out Be3 and Rc1.

15. ... Kh8!

This foils the plan (16. Be3 f5! 17. Rc1 f4! 18. R×c6 f×e3 19. f×e3 Bh4 and Black pieces swarm over the kingside). Note that the immediate 15. ... f5? allows 16. e×f6 B×f6 17. Q×e4 or 16. ... N×f6 17. Qe6+.

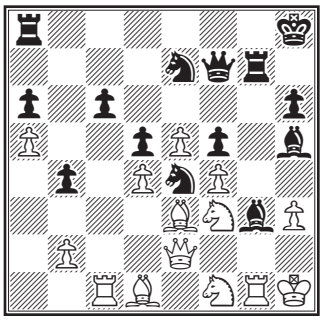
16. g4? Bg6 17. Nh2 Bh4 18. Be3 f5 19. f4 Bg3!

Better than 19. ... f×g4 20. h×g4 Ng3 which is unclear after 21. Qe1. After 19. ... Bg3 Black can meet the defense of the f-pawn, 20. Rf1, with 20. ... f×g4 21. h×g4 B×f4!? 22. R×f4 R×f4 23. B×f4 N×d4! with complex play.

20. g5 h6 21. g×h6 g×h6 22. Nd2 Ne7!

"The most difficult moment of the game," wrote Botvinnik. To carry out a winning plan of ... Bh5 and doubling rooks on the g-file he needed to defend d5. Now 23. N×e4 f×e4! 24. Qg4 is answered by 24. ... Rg8! 25. Q×g3 Bh5 26. Ng4 Nf5 27. Qf2 B×g4 28. h×g4 R×g4+ 29. Kf1 Rg3! and wins.

23. Kh1 Qe8! 24. Rg1 Bh5! 25. Nhf3 Rg8 26. Nf1 Qf7 27. Bd1 Rg7 28. Rc1 c6 *(diagram)*



After 28. ... c6

Soviet-era annotators indicated White is lost. But 29. N1d2! Rag8 30. Bc2 is unclear, according to Khalifman. Both sides were in "extreme time trouble," Botvinnik said.

29. Rc2?? Rag8 30. Rg2 B×f4!

The rest is routine (31. R×g7 Q×g7 32. B×f4 B×f3+ 33. Q×f3 Qg1 mate).

31. Q×a6 R×g2 32. R×g2 R×g2 33. K×g2 Qg6+ 34. Kh1 B×e3 35. N×e3 Nf2+ 36. Kh2 N×d1 0–1

When Mikhail Bulgakov's masterwork, *The Master and Margarita,* appeared 32 years later, chessplayers tried to determine whether the game played by the vodka-drinking cat Begemot was based on a real event. The evidence that it stems from Riumin–Botvinnik was discussed in the pages of *64* in the 1980s but without reaching a definite conclusion.

Botvinnik extended his tournament lead when he faced Gideon Ståhlberg, the Swedish rival of his 1926 match opponent Gösta Stoltz.

Moscow 1935
Botvinnik–Gideon Ståhlberg
D22 Queen's Gambit Declined, Tarrasch Defense

1. c4 e6 2. Nc3 d5 3. d4 c5 4. c×d5 e×d5 5. Nf3 Nc6 6. e3

White avoided 6. g3!, because his opponent was an expert in that line. As a result, he seems to outwit himself—by playing against a reversed version of his favorite Panov Attack.

6. ... c4! 7. Be2 Bb4 8. 0–0 Nge7 9. e4! d×e4

White gets too much play after 9. ... B×c3 10. b×c3 d×e4 11. Ng5 Qd5 12. f3.

10. N×e4 0–0 11. B×c4 Bg4 12. a3 Ba5 13. Ba2

White could keep his extra pawn with 13. Qd3!, based on 13. ... B×f3 14. Ng5!. Better is 13. ... Bb6 14. Be3 Nf5 but White has the edge after 15. Bg5.

13. ... Bb6 14. h3 B×f3 15. Q×f3 N×d4 16. Qh5 Nef5 17. Bg5 Qd7 18. Qg4

White seemed to have a knockout in 18. Nf6+? g×f6 19. B×f6 Ng7 20. Qg5. But Black could defend with 20. ... Ne6 21. Qg4 h5 22. Qg3 Qc7! 23. Be5 h4!.

18. ... Kh8 19. Rad1 Qc6 20. Nc3 Rae8

Black's position is held together by his bishop, which defends the d4-knight. But trying to eliminate it immediately, with 21. Nd5, fails to 21. ... Qg6! 22. N×b6? h5 23. Qf4 Ne2+.

21. Bb1! Qe6! 22. Rfe1? Qc8?

Botvinnik considered 22. ... Q×e1+! 23. R×e1 R×e1+ 24. Kh2 roughly equal. However, Black has the winning chances after 24. ... g6 and 25. ... Bc7+.

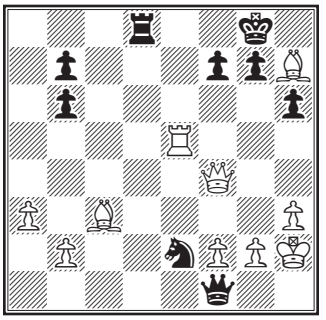
23. Nd5 h6?

Black had to preserve the bishop with 23. ... Bc5.

24. N×b6! a×b6 25. Bd2! R×e1+ 26. R×e1 Rd8 27. Bc3! Qc5 28. Qe4

White's bishops begin to make threats like 29. g4 and 29. B×d4.

28. ... Qc6 29. Qf4 Qb5 30. Kh2



After 33. Bh7+

By stopping ... Ne2+ White clears the way for a winning Re5, e.g. 30. ... Qd7 31. Re5 Ne7 32. B×d4 Ng6 and now the fastest is 33. Re8+! and Q×h6+.

30. ... Kg8 31. Re5 Qf1 32. B×f5 Ne2 33. Bh7+! *(diagram)*

Yes, 33. R×e2 was good enough to win. But White improved the idea: 33. ... K×h7 34. R×e2 Q×e2 loses to 35. Q×f7 Rg8 36. Qf5+ Kg8 37. Qg6! and mates. And 33. ... Kf8 fails to 34. Bb4+.

33. ... Kh8 34. R×e2 Q×e2 35. Q×f7 1–0

The Chekhover Mystery

Botvinnik held a point and a half lead after nine rounds and was sailing to victory in the strongest tournament he had played in. A victory every game seemed possible. After he was held to a draw by Vladimir Alatortsev, he showed the game to Lasker and repeatedly asked where he had missed a win. Lasker "flared up," he recalled. "What, you ought to win every game?" the former world champion asked.

However, Botvinnik's stamina again failed him. He had been allowed to spend a whole month at a sanatorium before the tournament, another government-arranged treat. But as Moscow 1935 ground on, he lost to two of his nemeses, Ilya Kan and Fyodor Bohatyrchuk, in rounds 13 and 15. His loss to Bohatyrchuk "was greeted by a deathly silence" from the pro–Botvinnik audience, wrote author and chess fan Leonid Zorin.

Suddenly Botvinnik trailed Salo Flohr by a half point with four rounds to go. First prize was in doubt. Winning the following game was vital.

Moscow 1935
Botvinnik–Vitaly Chekhover
A13 Réti Opening

1. Nf3 d5 2. c4 e6 3. b3 Nf6 4. Bb2

There is no record of Botvinnik playing anything like this before.

4. ... Be7 5. e3 0–0 6. Be2 c6 7. 0–0 Nbd7 8. Nc3 a6 9. Nd4

This provocative idea, preparing f2–f4, comes from Aron Nimzowitsch. Nimzowitsch–Torre, Baden-Baden 1925, went 1. Nf3 Nf6 2. b3 d5 3. e3 Bf5 4. Bb2 e6 5. Be2 Bd6 6. c4 Nbd7 7. Nc3 c6 8. 0–0 Qe7 9. c×d5 e×d5 10. Nd4 Be6 11. f4!.

9. ... d×c4 10. b×c4 Nc5?

This move makes sense only if ... e5! is played. More natural is 10. ... c5 and 11. ... b6. Black never completely frees his game now.

11. f4! Qc7 12. Nf3 Rd8 13. Qc2 Ncd7 14. d4 c5 15. Ne5 b6

The natural reply to 15. ... b6 is 16. Bf3. But that leads to exchanges after 16. ... Bb7. With such a positional advantage, White deserves an attack.

16. Bd3! c×d4

Botvinnik said 16. ... Bb7 17. d5! was dangerous for Black, e.g. 17. ... N×e5 18. f×e5 Q×e5 19. Ne4. Khalifman added 17. ... e×d5 18. N×d5 N×d5 19. c×d5 N×e5 20. B×h7+ Kh8 21. B×e5 Bd6 22. Bb2 B×d5 23. Qf5 and wins.

17. e×d4 Bb7 18. Qe2 Nf8 19. Nd1! Ra7?

Benjamin Blumenfeld, a lawyer and accomplished player who is credited with the Blumenfeld Counter Gambit, said in a lecture at the end of the tournament, "I would have played this move myself. It's a splendid move in connection with ... Qa8 and ... Be4." But Botvinnik concluded Black was now lost because he couldn't stop the maneuver Nd1–f2–h3–g5.

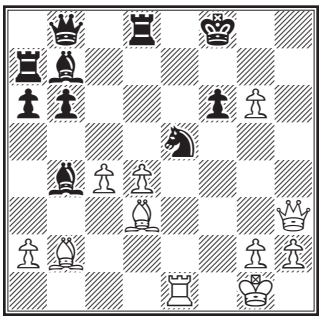
This was an exaggeration but Black should have anticipated the maneuver with 19. ... Ng6 (20. Ne3 Bd6 21. Rad1 Rac8 with a slight inferiority).

20. Nf2 Qb8 21. Nh3 h6 22. Ng5! h×g5 23. f×g5 N8d7?

In the tournament book, Mikhail Yudovich showed that White could now win with 24. N×d7 N×d7 25. R×f7! and then 25. ... K×f7 26. Qh5+ Kf8 27. Qh8+Kf7 28. g6+ Kf6 29. Qh4 mate. No better was 24. ... R×d7 25. g×f6 B×f6 26. R×f6! g×f6 27. Qg4+ Kf8 28. Ba3+. Black could improve with 23. ... N6h7 since 24. N×f7 N×g5 25. Qh5 can be met by the surprise defense, 25. ... Bf3! 26. g×f3 N×f7 or 26. R×f3 N×f3+ 27. Q×f3 Rc8 with a lot of game left. Another reasonable try is 23. ... Qc7 24. g×f6 (24. Rae1!) B×f6 25. Rae1 B×e5, according to Khalifman.

24. N×f7? K×f7 25. g6+ Kg8?

Yudovich said 25. ... Kf8 was also lost. But the Yugoslav magazine *Šahovski Glasnik* said 25. ... Kf8 26. Q×e6 Ne5 27. d×e5 Bc5+ 28. Kh1 B×g2+ 29. K×g2 R×d3 30. R×f6+ led only to perpetual check. Botvinnik initially accepted that as true. But it's a mirage: Black wins with 30. ... g×f6! 31. Q×f6+ Kg8 32. Qe6+ Kh8 33. Qf6+ Rg7 34. Qh4+ Kg8. Note how useful 19. ... Ra7 proves to be. Botvinnik later claimed that White can still win with 27. R×f6+ instead of 27. d×e5, e.g. 27. ... g×f6 28. Qh3! Bb4 29. Re1! *(analysis diagram)*.



Analysis with 29. Re1

And now 29. ... Bc8 30. Qh6+ Ke8 31. d×e5! B×e1 32. Qh8+ Kd7 33. Qg7+ Kc6 34. Q×f6+ Kc7 35. e6. But 29. ... B×g2! again allows Black's a7-rook to defend, e.g. 30. Q×g2? N×d3! or 30. K×g2 B×e1 31. d×e5 f×e5 32. Qf5+ Ke8 33. Ba3 Re7.

26. Q×e6+ Kh8 27. Qh3+ Kg8 28. Bf5 Nf8 29. Be6+ N×e6 30. Q×e6+ Kh8 31. Qh3+ Kg8 32. R×f6! B×f6 33. Qh7+ Kf8 34. Re1! Be5

Otherwise 35. Qh8 or 35. Ba3+ is deadly.

35. Qh8+ Ke7 36. Q×g7+ Kd6 37. Q×e5+ Kd7 38. Qf5+

"Strangely enough, amidst these numerous checks White almost always has to find the only one that leads to his goal," Botvinnik wrote in *Analytical.* But there were alternative wins he didn't mention, such as 35. d×e5 (35. ... Ke8 36. e6 Qf4 37. Qg8+ Qf8 38. Qf7+! [Khalifman]).

38. ... Kc6 39. d5+ Kc5 40. Ba3+ K×c4 41. Qe4+ Kc3 42. Bb4+ Kb2 43. Qb1 checkmate

Second-guessing this game has continued for more than 70 years. In 2008, for example, analysis on www.truechess.com showed that 25. g6+? was a blunder and that Botvinnik missed a fairly simple win with 25. Qh5+ Kg8 26. g×f6 N×f6 27. R×f6! B×f6 28. Bg6, leading to various forced mates in 11 to 17 moves.

But questions about this game go beyond sacrifices. Botvinnik annotated seven of his nine wins, including some ho-hum crushes, in the tournament book. But the analysis of this game was strangely left to Yudovich, who was often given journeyman duties in Soviet publications. And despite the dramatic moves, the game received relatively minor treatment in the Soviet press. Moreover, Botvinnik never annotated this game while Chekhover was alive, as pointed out by critics who believe the game was composed.

Botvinnik acknowledged the suspicion in *Analytical.* The Chekhover game "created such an impression that some 'experts' even asserted that it had been compiled beforehand." His denial was less than ringing: "Even if it is assumed that I could have been under suspicion, would this have been fair to such an honest person as Vitaly Chekhover?"

Bear in mind that the flaws in the game were not discovered until well after the tournament. Yet the committee that awarded seven best-played and "beauty" prizes did not honor it. They gave Botvinnik a joint 1st–2nd prize for the Riumin victory and nothing else.

"What Should Be Done?"

Whatever the case, Botvinnik failed to press home an edge with Black against Lilienthal in round 17 and agreed fairly quickly to a draw with Flohr the next day. That left Botvinnik and Flohr tied for the lead before the final round, when Botvinnik was to have Black against Ilya Rabinovich while the Czech had White against Alatortsev.

Botvinnik said he was in his hotel room the night before when Nikolai Krylenko appeared. "What would you say if Rabinovich were to lose to you?" he asked. Botvinnik said if he realized his opponent was throwing the game he would put a piece en prise and resign. "Krylenko looked at me with obvious friendliness," he wrote. "Well, what should be done?" he asked.

Botvinnik then recalled how Flohr had agreed in advance to draw their final match game two years before. He might accept a package of two draws this time, he said. Besides, "he might be frightened that Rabinovich will throw the game."

Just then Samuil Vainshtein came to the room and announced that Flohr himself had proposed a two-draw deal. "Krylenko beamed" and Rabinovich readily agreed to draw, Botvinnik said. Everything was set — until Alatortsev refused. So Krylenko told Botvinnik not to be the first to offer a draw. But he did anyway and drew in 24 moves. Fortunately Flohr got no edge and agreed to a draw in 23 moves so they shared first prize.

This made Botvinnik a legitimate world championship candidate. As Vadim Faibisovich noted, it had taken him 12 years since he learned the moves to reach this point; it was also 12 years for Mikhail Tal and 13 for Garry Kasparov to do the same. Botvinnik's performance was a life-changing event in other ways. Grigory Ordzhonikidze, the People's Commissar of Heavy Industry, was urged by Botvinnik supporters to award him an automobile, an unheard-of benefit in 1935. *Achieving the Aim* said "some people" tried to lobby Krylenko against this "so as not to spoil Botvinnik." Krylenko delayed but eventually called Ordzhonikidze, a powerful figure in the Stalinist leadership, who approved. "As a result I became a car driver," Botvinnik said. He also received a raise in his monthly student stipend from 300 to 500 rubles. The tournament book said he would be given 5,000 rubles and Flohr, as a foreigner, would get $400 in prizes. Botvinnik said he used his prize to buy redwood bedroom furniture from a former tsarist colonel.

Fyodor Bohatyrchuk viewed the star treatment accorded Botvinnik with undisguised disdain. "When at the end of the '20s the Soviet authorities decided that chess could be a very effective instrument of propaganda, they began to seek a younger player on whom they could place their stake," he wrote in his memoirs. "He was soon found in the person of Mikhail Botvinnik. They presented him with a special trainer, who before each tournament accompanied him to first-class resorts. The government took care of all expenses."

Bohatyrchuk, a Ukrainian radiologist who was turning against Communism, conceded that the *vlasti* had made a good choice. "Seeing that Botvinnik confirmed their hopes," they "began to finance other chess enterprises." As a result, he said, before World War II "a young chessplayer without any special education could earn" the salary of a university professor.

Botvinnik's international reputation was also enhanced this year when Savielly Tar-

takower wrote a small book, *Neue Schachsterne*. He analyzed the games of 30 "new chess stars," some quickly forgotten like Robert Crépaux and Rudolf Pitschak, and began alphabetically, with "Botvinnik, the Profound." But the Russian did little to further burnish his reputation that year. The 19 Moscow games were the last he played in 1935.

Moscow 1936

In another indication of his growing influence, the third Moscow International came about after Botvinnik wrote a letter to Krylenko. He claimed that the second International proved little. There were "weak masters" in Moscow 1935, he said, alluding to Menchik, Vasya Pirc and, yes, Chekhover. A better test of USSR chess would be a smaller field, five strong Soviets and five foreigners, he said. Krylenko, placing his trust in Botvinnik, agreed and sent him to work out the details with Alexander Kosarev, a top Komsomol figure and secretary to the Central Committee. Kosarev readily gave his approval.

Krylenko's motives for creating Moscow 1936 went beyond chess. His career had been an upward spiral until being replaced as the USSR's Prosecutor General by Andrei Vishinsky. He had come under mounting criticism from political rivals. "Matters became much worse in 1934-35 when he began to actively oppose the decree of death sentence for minors" even though he knew it had been approved "with the agreement of Stalin," according to historian Sergei Karastelin.

Botvinnik's letter to Krylenko came just in time. "It was just the gift of fate that Krylenko had been agonizingly seeking and he wrote a note to the Central Committee (naturally, oriented personally to Stalin) about the necessity of conducting such a competition," Karastelin wrote. "Stalin liked the idea" and "gave Krylenko carte blanche" in organizing the tournament, he added. Moscow 1936 would take attention away from the nation's miseries and remind the world that the USSR, isolated in so many ways, was important in at least one realm of human activity.

Well before the first move of the tournament on May 14, Botvinnik enjoyed a huge time edge. He was training with "Slava" Ragozin in April, while the rest of the Soviet players were yet to be invited. In his memoirs, more than four decades later, Botvinnik mentioned Ragozin often, as if every reader knew about their collaboration at the time. Far from it.

Botvinnik lived by a code of secrecy. "Everything is wrapped in a veil of mystery," Svetozar Gligorić later said of him. "Botvinnik, very cautious by nature, did not confide in even his closest colleagues, and his trainer or trainers were as if bound by a vow of silence," he wrote. In his championship years when he had several trainers and sparring partners they "probably did not even know one another," Gligorić added.

Botvinnik acknowledged the secret nature of the six practice games he had with Ragozin in Zacherenye, southeast of Leningrad, when he wrote, nearly thirty years later, that they had a "gentleman's agreement" not to disclose the moves. Botvinnik broke the pact when a Ragozin game collection appeared and he annotated the one game he lost "in order that the reader can understand the 'Ragozin problem.'" One of the three games he won was:

Training game, Zacherenye 1936
Vyacheslav Ragozin–Botvinnik
C15 French Defense

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. a3 B×c3+ 5. b×c3 d×e4

Botvinnik's training games often tested specific openings or playing conditions. Alexander Alekhine had played 4. a3 in the 1935 world championship match and "naturally it was expected that it would be met in tournament practice," Botvinnik wrote.

6. Qg4 Nf6 7. Q×g7 Rg8 8. Qh6 c5 9. Ne2 Nc6 10. Bb2?!

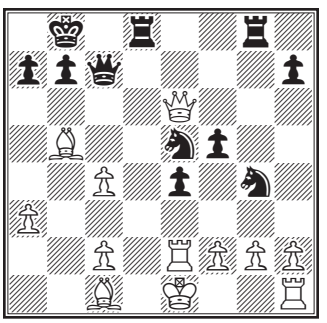
Vasily Smyslov showed in the 1954 world championship match that White shouldn't shy away from d×c5!, since his bishops benefit from opening the center more than he is hurt by tripled pawns.

10. ... Bd7 11. Rd1 Rg6 12. Qe3 Qa5

The threat of ... c×d4 forces White's hand. His bishop is revealed to be misplaced on b2.

13. d×c5 0–0–0! 14. Ng3 Ng4 15. Q×e4 Q×c5 16. Rd2 Qb6! 17. Bc1 f5 18. Qc4 Qb1?!

The queen looks impressive on b1 but "does nothing," Botvinnik said, and better was 18. ... Kb8 or 18. ... e5. White's next move threatens to escape into an endgame with 20. Qb3!.



After 27. c4

19. Ne2 Qb6 20. Nf4 Rgg8 21. Bd3 Kb8 22. Qb3

Or 22. 0–0? Nge5!, winning the Exchange.

22. ... Qc7 23. Re2 e5 24. Ne6 B×e6 25. Q×e6 e4 26. Bb5 Nce5 27. c4? *(diagram)*

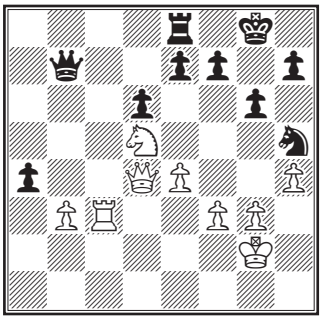
A blunder. But Black's initiative would be strong after 27. Rd2! Qc5! and would win after 28. 0–0? Nf3+.

27. ... N×h2! 28. R×h2 0–1

White resigned before Black could play 28. ... Nf3+ (29. g×f3 Rg1 mate or 29. Kf1 Rd1+).

Intrigue figured in the selection of the Soviet invitees to Moscow 1936. Ragozin, Kan, Levenfish and, of course, Botvinnik were on the initial list, according to Karastelin. Romanovsky, Alatortsev and Bohatrychuk vied for the final Soviet spot. But Krylenko chose Riumin, Karastelin said. Another version, from Alatortsev, is that he, not Ragozin, was on the original list but was removed at Botvinnik's request. Alatortsev had drawn a 12-game match with Lilienthal in 1935 and was trying to challenge Botvinnik to a match. But Krylenko told Alatortsev that Botvinnik would refuse to play at Moscow 1936 if he, Alatortsev, were invited. "Tell him I'll lose to him," Alatortsev replied."No, no, he won't play," Krylenko said.

The tournament began just before a heat wave at the un–air-conditioned Hall of Columns. Botvinnik began with draws against Emanuel Lasker and Riumin. Then came a workmanlike win from Lilienthal, without sacrifices and few tactics, that was somehow awarded the first brilliancy prize. "On this occasion no one suspected that it had been made up beforehand," he wrote in *Analytical,* "as the game was typical of my play at that time" *(diagram)*.



Botvinnik–Lilienthal,
Moscow 1936
After 26. ... b×a4

Now 27. Rc7! gave Black a chance to allow mate (27. ... Q×b3?? 28. N×e7+ R×e7 29. Rc8+). His reply, 27. ... Qb5, gave him hope of counterplay (28. N×e7+? R×e7 29. R×e7 a×b3). Instead, play went 28. b×a4 Qe2+ 29. Qf2 Q×f2+ 30. K×f2.

Botvinnik is often credited with the observation that knight endgames are very much like pawn endgames because they use the same principles. But in *Analytical* Botvinnik indicated that it was his second who deserved the credit. A 1952 game was "a classic confirmation of Ragozin's assertion that there is no great difference between pawn endings and knight endings," he wrote. That would have been clear after 30. ... Ra8? 31. Rc8+ R×c8 32. N×e7+. It was also true as the game went, 30. ... e6 31. Nb6 Nf6 32. a5 Rb8 33. Rc8+!. The rest was routine (33. ... R×c8 34. N×c8 Ne8 35. a6 Nc7 36. a7 Na8 37. N×d6 Kf8 38. e5 Ke7 39. Ke3 f6 40. Kf4 h6 41. Nc8+ Kf7 42. Ke4 Kg7 43. Kd4 Nc7 44. Kc5 1–0).

But lack of experience cost Botvinnik in round seven:

Moscow 1936
Botvinnik–José Capablanca
A30 English Opening

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 b6 4. Bg2 Bb7 5. 0–0 c5 6. b3 Nc6

Capablanca considered his last move very weak and preferred 6. ... Be7 7. Bb2 d5. The Hedgehog formation was (wrongly) considered bad.

7. Bb2 Be7 8. Nc3 0–0 9. d4 N×d4! 10. N×d4 B×g2 11. K×g2 c×d4 12. Q×d4 Qc7 13. e4

A modern (2002) view, from Alexander Beliavsky and Adrian Mikhalchishin, said "Black should play ... Rfd8 followed by ... d6, ... a6 and ... Rac8 with an excellent game."

13. ... Rad8? 14. Rad1 Qb7 15. f3

In the Lilienthal game Black engineered a bad ... b5 in a similar pawn formation. Capa find a different way to change the structure.

15. ... Ne8 16. Rd2 f5!? 17. Rfd1 Bg5 18. Rd3 Bf6 19. e5!

Black would be equal after 19. Qe3 f×e4 20. Q×e4 Q×e4, Botvinnik felt.

19. ... Be7 20. Qf2 Rf7

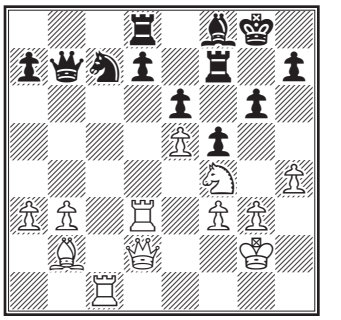
"Again a passive move," Capablanca complained in the tournament book. "By ... g5–g4 Black could at least have tied up the opponent's pieces somewhat."

21. Qd2 Bb4 22. a3 Bf8 23. Ne2! Nc7 24. Nf4 g6 25. h4!

White threatens to bring decisive pressure to e6, d7 or the kingside. Both players considered Black's next move an error. But Capa's suggestion, 25. ... Qc8, isn't much better in view of 26. a4, e.g. 26. ... Bh6 27. Rd6.

25. ... b5 26. c×b5 Q×b5 27. Rc1 Qb7? *(diagram)*

Neither player criticized this. With 27. ... Qb6! Black allows the same combination as in the game. But he would haved stopped 28. Qa5!, which should have won in the game (27. ... Qb7? 28. Qa5! Rc8 29. Rdc3 or 28. ... d5 29. e×d6 R×d6 30. Qe5 and 29. ... B×d6 30. Be5).



After 27. ... Qb7

28. R×c7? Q×c7 29. N×e6 d×e6 30. R×d8 f4

Capablanca found the best chance for counterplay (31. g×f4 R×f4 32. Q×f4 Q×d8 and ... Qd1) as both players hit time trouble. Botvinnik later told Viktor Malkin that Capa was "the greatest player" because of his intuition. At Moscow, Botvinnik saw Capa give five minute to one minute odds in speed chess against "almost every Soviet master," Malkin wrote. "This he [Botvinnik] admired because he himself was a slow player."

31. g4 Qe7 32. Kh3 Qb7?

But here 32. ... Qc5! 33. Kg2 Qe7 was better since it's not clear how White can improve his position.

33. Qd3 Kg7 34. b4 a5 35. b5 a4 36. g5! Bc5

Capablanca recalled that White's clock flag was on the tilt as they reached the last moves of the time control. Experience told him the right way to play such a situation was 37. Kg4, avoiding forcing moves.

Botvinnik felt his next move was "correct"—and yet "should not have been made." The reason was the clock. In his notes to Ostojić–Botvinnik, Wijk aan Zee 1970, he said the proper way to handle a favorable position against a passively placed opponent was to follow "the strategic priyome of the chessplayer/practician"—don't "begin decisive action before the time control."

37. Rd6! B×d6 38. e×d6+ Kf8 39. Bf6?

"Not to the advantage of the Soviet masters was the latest and new time control, two and a half hours for 40 moves," Levenfish wrote in the tournament book. If it had been 37 moves in two and a half hours, as it was at Moscow 1935, Botvinnik would have had a full hour to find 39. Qc3! Ke8 40. Qc6+!, since the pawns win after 40. ... Q×c6 41. b×c6. Also winning is 40. ... Rd7 41. Be5. The hardest line, but quite calculable with an extra hour, is 40. ... Qd7! 41. Bf6! e5+ 42. Kg2 Kf8 43. Qa8+ Qe8 44. Qd5 Rd7 45. Be7+ Kg7 46. Q×e5+ Kf7 47. Qf6+ Kg8 48. Qe6+ Kg7 49. Kh3.

39. ... Ke8 40. Be7? Rf5!

White could have kept Black's rook boxed in with 40. Kg2. Then his active queen (40. ... Kd7 41. Qc4) can "draw easily" as Botvinnik said. As the game goes he can safely resign at move 43.

41. Qc3 Kd7 42. b6 Qc6! 43. Qg7 Q×f3+ 44. Kh2 Qg3+ 45. Kh1 Q×h4+ 46. Kg1 Qe1+ 47. Kh2 Kc6! 48. Qb2 Rd5 49. Qc2+ Kb5 0–1

Botvinnik said he developed insomnia — for the first but not the last time — during the tournament because "it was terribly hot, and there was constant noise on the street.... But I was young and with my insomnia I played well. I forced myself to play."

Botvinnik seems to have learned how to inure himself to the emotional damage of losing. He had suffered two straight losses in the semifinals of the 7th Soviet Championship, the finals of the 8th and at the start of Hastings 1934-35 and would twice suffer two consecutive defeats in the Levenfish match of 1937. But he always managed to rebound.

The day after the Capa game he relieved his "grief" by seeing a comedy at the celebrated Moscow Art Theater, he wrote in *Achieving the Aim*. During the intermission he heard a member of the audience behind him express surprise that the Soviet champion was there: "But he lost yesterday, how can he go to the theater?"

Although the tournament was only half over, the standings didn't change much. Botvinnik had an easy time with Lasker as White, waited for Riumin to collapse in an even endgame and won methodical games from Flohr and Kan in the second half. Before playing Ragozin in the penultimate round, "people were trying to persude me to make a draw" so that his friend would finish higher, he wrote. Botvinnik asked the higher authorities what to do. Krylenko "just shrugged his shoulder" but Kosarev of Komsomol said, "Play to win, Mikhail." He did and won in 37 moves.

But he trailed Capablanca on the final day. He had Black against Levenfish that day while Capa had White against Erich Eliskases. Garry Kasparov said "the authorities had allegedly 'asked'" Levenfish to lose to Botvinnik. But confirmation of this is lacking. Instead they drew and Botvinnik finished second. He was two and a half points ahead of third-place Flohr, the player who was considered his equal a year before.

The tournament also proved to be a personal triumph for Krylenko. On July 20, six weeks after the final round of Moscow 1936, he was appointed USSR Commissar of

Justice, his highest post. Once again the Krylenko-Botvinnik collaboration had proven mutually beneficial.

Nottingham

Botvinnik always seemed to know what his next tournament would be. He knew by winter 1935-36 of the Nottingham invitational that would be held in August. His request to have Gayane accompany him to England was approved. This was extraordinary because of the Soviet fear that citizens would defect if they weren't abandoning loved ones. "But Krylenko had seen that when my wife came to Moscow for the last rounds of the 1936 tournament, my results improved," Botvinnik wrote. Krylenko got approval for this from Mikhail Kalinin, the nominal Soviet head of state.

The Botvinniks, with "a sizable sum" of spending money, left Leningrad in late July on a rocky sailing that took four and a half days to reach London. After some shopping trips, including checking out women's hats at Selfridge's, they took an express train to Nottingham. Over Gayane's advice, he declined to pay for meals in the hotel — until they ate at a cheap cafe and found their teeth crunching sand in their spinach.

Nottingham was distinguished by the presence of four world champions, Lasker, Capablanca, Alekhine and Euwe, and four young players who sought the title, Botvinnik, Reuben Fine, Samuel Reshevsky and Flohr. There were also four British invitees, the "rabbits" who the prize contenders had to beat if they wanted to contend. Botvinnik began by outplaying one rabbit, Conel Hugh Alexander, as Black in the first round. An up-and-down draw with Fine the next day was followed by a politically fraught game with Bogolyubov. Since renouncing his Soviet citizenship in 1926, Bogo had never played a Soviet player.

Nottingham 1936
Yefim Bogolyubov–Botvinnik
E14 Queen's Indian Defense

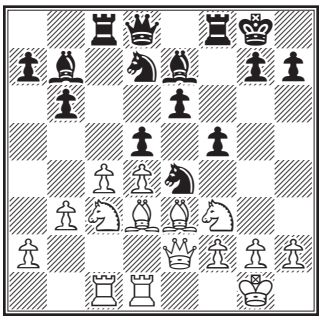
1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 b6 3. e3 c5 4. c4 Bb7 5. Nc3 c×d4 6. e×d4 e6 7. Bd3 Be7 8. 0–0 0–0?! 9. b3?! d5!

For several moves White had been tempted to gain space with d4–d5 — while Black resisted stopping him with ... d5. White missed an excellent chance for 9. d5! since 9. ... e×d5 10. c×d5 N×d5 11. N×d5 B×d5 favors him after 12. B×h7+!. After the text, White should adopt the usual heavy-piece setup of 10. Qe2 and Rd1.

10. Be3?! Ne4! 11. Rc1 Nd7

Black has equalized and would have the edge after 12. c×d5 N×c3! 13. R×c3 B×d5 due to the isolated d-pawn.

12. Qe2 Rc8 13. Rfd1 f5! *(diagram)*



After 13. ... f5

White's position is suddenly precarious. After 14. Ne5 Black can continue 14. ... f4! 15. Bd2 N×e5 since 16. d×e5 f3! 17. g×f3 N×d2 and ... Bg5 favors him, as does 16. B×e4 d×e4 17. d×e5 f3!.

14. Bf4 g5! 15. Be5?

White's difficulties are illustrated by 15. Bd2 g4 16. Ne1 N×d2 17. Q×e6+ Rf7 18. R×d2 Bg5. Or 18. B×f5 Nf8 19. B×h7+ N×h7 20. Q×g4+ Rg7. Better was 15. Be3 because 15. ... f4? 16. Bd2 leaves Black overextended.

15. ... g4 16. Ne1 N×e5!

Now 17. d×e5 Bg5 18. Rc2 N×c3 19. R×c3 d4 makes Black's position more pleasant, if not clearly better. Botvinnik recalled that he treated Bogolyubov no differently than he did the other players. When his opponent forgot to punch his clock during the game, he reminded him. Bogo, by then more German than Russian, asked "Was?" and then thanked him.

17. B×e4?

Botvinnik wrote "17. d×e5 Qc7! 18. B×e4 leads only to a transposition of moves" when he annotated this game in his first game collections. But White would hardly be lost after 18. Nb5! Q×e5 19. N×a7 Bd6 20. g3.

17. ... d×e4 18. d×e5 Qc7 19. Nb5 Q×e5

The difference is that now 20. N×a7 Rcd8 or 20. ... Ra8 is a pronounced Black advantage. When he captured on e4, Bogolyubov either missed Black's next move, as Botvinnik believed, or misevaluated the position after 22. ... Rcd8.

20. Rd7 Bg5 21. Rcd1 Bc6 22. R×a7 Rcd8! 23. h4

White is just holding on now with this trap (23. ... g×h3? 24. Qh5!). He would be losing after 23. Nc2 R×d1+ 24. Q×d1 Rd8 25. Qe1 B×b5 26. c×b5 Rd2 27. Ne3 and then 27. ... B×e3! 28. f×e3 Qd5 wins with the threat of ... Rd1, e.g. 29. Qh4 Rd1+ 30. Kf2 Qd2+ 31. Kg3 Q×e3+, as pointed out by Ilya Rabinovich.

23. ... R×d1 24. Q×d1 Rd8 25. Qc2 Bd2! 0–1

In view of 26. Qb1 e3! 27. f×e3 Q×e3+ 28. Kf1 B×e1 30. Q×e1 B×g2+. Four rounds later he celebrated his 25th birthday by drawing easily with Capablanca. Birthdays were lucky for Botvinnik. He had crushed Alatortsev on the day he turned 23 in 1934 and would win one of his greatest games, from Milan Vidmar, on his 35th birthday at Groningen 1946.

Collective Spirit

Before he had left Moscow, Botvinnik attended a farewell dinner at the National Hotel where he met the deputy director of Agitprop (Agitation and Propaganda) for the

Central Committee. "What a terrible thing, chess!" A. Angarov, exclaimed. "Why?" Botvinnik asked. "Well, here we are wanting to help you, yet how can we do this?" Angarov said "sadly," then joined Botvinnik in laughing.

This was the collective spirit that Soviet society encouraged. Even 66-year-old Emanuel Lasker was imbued with it after taking up residence in the USSR in 1935. Before the 13th round in Nottingham, when Lasker was to play tournament leader Euwe, he unexpectedly showed up at Botvinnik's hotel room. "I am living in Moscow now and as a representative of the Soviet Union I consider it my duty to play for a win tomorrow against Euwe since I am White," he announced.

"I waved my hand," Botvinnik recalled in *Achieving the Aim,* "and said, 'What's this, my dear doctor, if you make a draw that would be fine.'" He said Lasker sighed with relief and left after a handshake. In the end, Lasker won a level endgame thanks to an Euwe blunder. This allowed Botvinnik to take the lead by winning this game:

Nottingham 1936
Botvinnik–Milan Vidmar
D60 Queen's Gambit Declined

1. c4 e6 2. Nf3 d5 3. d4 Nf6 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bg5 0–0 6. e3 Nbd7 7. Bd3

Theory circa 1936 held that only Akiba Rubinstein's 7. Qc2 and 7. Rc1 offered White a realistic chance for advantage. The bishop move allowed equality in three ways, after 7. ... d×c4 8. B×c4 a6 9. a4 c5, or 8. ... Nd5 9. B×e7 Q×e7 or 8. ... b6 and 9. ... Bb7, according to Levenfish's authoritative 1937 analysis.

7. ... c5 8. 0–0 c×d4 9. e×d4 d×c4 10. B×c4 Nb6 11. Bb3

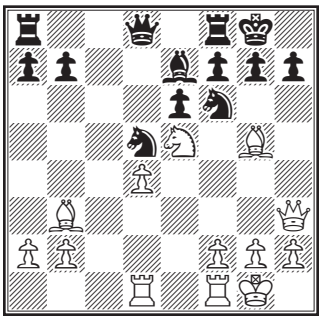
But after his experiences in the 5th Soviet Championship, Botvinnik came to the conclusion he should "adopt opening systems of little popularity because the positional subtleties of these systems was insufficiently known." One subtlety that arose from 7. Bd3 was the way f7 becomes vulnerable. His game with Andrei Batuyev in the 1930-31 Leningrad Championship went 11. ... Nbd5 12. Ne5 Nd7 13. B×e7 N×e7 14. Qe2 Nf6 15. Rfd1 b6 16. Rac1 Bb7 17. f3!? Rc8? (17. ... Ned5 18. Ne4 Rc8) and now 18. N×f7! R×f7 19. Q×e6 Qf8 20. Ne4 R×c1 21. R×c1 Nfd5 22. Nd6 Ba8 23. Re1! g6 24. N×f7 Q×f7 25. Q×e7! 1–0. In this game Botvinnik is more aggressive, placing his rooks to support f2–f4–f5!.

11. ... Bd7 12. Qd3

With a2–a4 and ... a6 added, Levenfish said White had nothing after 13. Ne5 Be8! or 13. Qe2 Nfd5 14. B×e7 N×e7 15. Ne5 Rc8. Botvinnik is looking for an opportunity to pressure h7 and e6 with Qh3. He thought he would have an edge even after the accurate 12. ... Nfd5! 13. Be3 N×c3 14. b×c3 Ba4 15. c4.

12. ... Nbd5 13. Ne5 Bc6 14. Rad1

Botvinnik felt that 14. ... Qa5 15. Bc1 would favor him (15. ... N×c3 16. N×c6!). Alekhine recommended 14. ... Rc8 15. Qh3 N×c3 and ... Be4 to safeguard the kingside. Botvin-



After 16. ... Nb×d5

nik recalled that the tournament was one of the happiest periods of his life. Gayane sat in the first row of the spectators and watched his play for four hours in a row. "The English were surprised and smiled," he recalled.

14. ... Nb4? 15. Qh3! Bd5 16. N×d5 Nb×d5? *(diagram)*

Black should retake 16. ... Nf×d5 so he can meet f2–f4 with ... f5!?.

17. f4! Rc8

The strong f4–f5×e6 plan had been known since Lasker's victory over Géza Maróczy at Paris 1900. Black would lose the Exchange if he stops the pawn with 17. ... g6? (18. Bh6 Re8 19. Ba4) and he would invite calamity after 17. ... Ne4 (intending ... f5) 18. N×f7! K×f7 19. Rde1!.

18. f5 e×f5

Botvinnik considered this a positional error, although he admitted 18. ... Qd6 19. f×e6 f×e6 20. Rfe1 makes it hard to defend the e6-pawn.

19. R×f5 Qd6

Botvinnik's remarkable memory was tested 24 years later at the Leipzig Olympiad. A young German-speaking Soviet military officer, Yuri Tregyonkov, was assigned to drive him around the city in a Volkswagen. During one ride he suddenly asked about the Vidmar game. "Do you recall, Mikhail Moiseyevich, on the 20th move you sacrificed on f7? I really like this combination," the officer said. "But what would you have done if Vidmar had found the stronger 19. ... Rc7?" As they drove on Botvinnik visualized the position in his mind. Then he went through several variations with the driver in which the sacrifice would still work. For example, 19. ... Rc7 20. Rdf1 would make 21. N×f7! decisive (21. ... R×f7 22. B×d5 N×d5 23. R×f7 B×g5 24. Qe6). When the conversation was over Botvinnik said in parting, "And you, it turns out, are fluent not only in German but in the language of chess."

20. N×f7! R×f7

Or 20. ... K×f7 22. B×f6 B×f6 23. R×d5.

21. B×f6 B×f6

The rook at c8 hangs after 21. ... N×f6 22. R×f6!.

22. R×d5 Qc6 23. Rd6! Qe8 24. Rd7! 1–0

After a difficult, 56-move draw with Euwe in the next round, Botvinnik was tied with Capablanca. Another tense final round loomed: He was due for White against one of the rabbits, William Winter, while the Cuban had White against Bogolyubov, who was still one of the half dozen or so best players in the world. Capablanca, perhaps mindful

of machinations before the last round at Moscow 1935 and Moscow 1936, approached Botvinnik shortly after their games had started. He put his arm around the Soviet champion and strolled with him about the tournament hall, saying "You have a good position, and I have, too. Let us both have a draw and share first place."

Botvinnik saw through this and found a way of saying that he could not make such a decision alone. "Of course I am prepared to accept your offer," he replied. However, he hinted that this would not sit well with the collective spirit. "But what will they say in Moscow?" he added."Capa just raised his arms wide," Botvinnik wrote.

But Botvinnik soon recognized he was tired from the Euwe game. His position against Winter was worse when it was adjourned at move 38. Botvinnik said it was his "chessplayer-practician instinct" that inspired to him offer a draw. Winter, a British Communist, was suspected of accepting the draw for political reasons.

Meanwhile, Capablanca adjourned with an extra Exchange and a passed a-pawn on the sixth rank. During the break, Botvinnik found Gayane in tears, because the strain on her was ending. "Now that the tournament is over I can cry," she said.

When they returned to the playing hall, they found a small miracle had occurred. There was a dead drawn rook-and-bishops-of-opposite-color position on Capablanca's demonstration board. When the game ended, Botvinnik had repeated his Moscow 1935 success by tieing for first prize in the strongest tournament of the year.

A greatly relieved Gayane spoke briefly in English at the final banquet and the other guests stamped their feet and tapped the tables with their fingers "in a sign of approval," Botvinnik recalled. Alekhine paid him tribute after the tournament by writing in the *Manchester Guardian* that Botvinnik's result confirmed that he was the "most likely" candidate for the world championship.

In his later years Botvinnik tried to belittle his political pull. "But it is obvious," Viktor Korchnoi told *New in Chess.* "He was the first Soviet man to be presented with a car. A person who got telegrams from the great Stalin when he shared first place at Nottingham. A god!" Botvinnik's nephew Igor corrected Korchnoi, noting that a telegram in his name *was sent to* Stalin announcing his Nottingham success.

Still, his performance was hailed in Moscow, where Krylenko arranged for a special tournament bulletin to be issued and organized a series of tributes, formal and informal, for Botvinnik when he returned. The Presidium of the Central Executive Committee, then the highest governing body of the USSR, awarded him a Badge of Honor. Alexander Chevryakov, one of the committee chairmen, said that Nottingham advanced "the cause of the Socialist revolution."

"High praise indeed!" Botvinnik recalled.

6. From Levenfish to AVRO

Botvinnik refused to play in the 10th Soviet Championship, held at Tblisi in April–May 1937, on the grounds that he was "defending my thesis." Technically, he defended it at the Polytechnic on June 28. Nevertheless, his refusal to play in Tblisi outraged some of his benefactors. Among them was Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky, who had returned from Prague in the summer of 1935 and held a diplomatic post in the secret police, the NKVD. He "censured me" and "Krylenko sent a threatening telegram," which read "I will raise your conduct at the Central Committee," Botvinnik recalled in *Achieving the Aim*.

"Threatening" could have been an ominous term because the USSR was entering its darkest era, the Terror. Yet in his memoirs Botvinnik made it appear that the West invented the 20-minute trials and executions. He wrote that the British press "was conducting an intensive anti–Soviet campaign" at the time of the Nottingham tournament." This was a veiled recognition of foreign reporting about the infamous show trial of 14 high-ranking Communist Party members and Stalin rivals including Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev that was held during Nottingham. The defendants were found guilty and shot the day of the Botvinnik–Vidmar game.

Near the end of his life Botvinnik told Gennady Sosonko that reports of tens of millions of victims of the collectivization and the Gulag were improbable. "There were camps, of course, but many returned from the camps, very many, including some of my friends," he said. To another interviewer, Sarah Hurst, he said matter-of-factly, "Mass repression started in 1937. I was very busy that year with tournaments, and I had my doctoral thesis to write, so I didn't feel the effects of it."

But the effects of the horrific campaign were obvious. Powerful Party officials Botvinnik had met and courted began to disappear. Grigory Ordzhonikidze, who gave Botvinnik his car, committed suicide on February 18, 1937. Alexander Chevryakov, who awarded him the Badge of Honor in 1936, did the same on June 16, 1937. Alexander Kosarev of Komosol was shot by 1939.

Even chess players fell victim. Pyotr Izmailov, the only player whose career record against Botvinnik was 2–0, was tried in secret on April 28, 1937, and executed the same day after a 20-minute trial. The charges included traveling to a chess tournament in Leningrad to advance the plot of a "counter-revolutionary Trotskyite-fascist terrorist

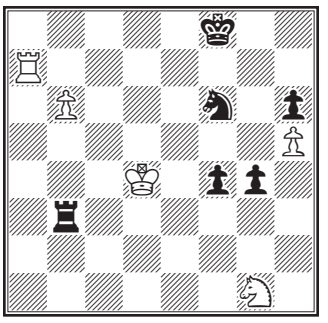
organization" to kill Stalin, Leningrad party boss Andrei Zhdanov, and others. Other Botvinnik opponents, including Arvid Kubbel, Vladimir Petrov and Mikhail Shebarshin would disappear into the Gulag, never to return.

Another player Botvinnik had faced, Andrei Batuyev, didn't dare reveal his family's most sensitive secret: He was a grand-nephew of Lenin himself. In the 1920s that would have demanded respect. But in the 1930s it put him at risk because of Stalin's deep-seated jealousy of the leader of the Revolution. Batuyev, a naturalist who kept a wide variety of wild animals, including monkeys, parrots and snakes, in a tiny Leningrad apartment, disclosed his family connection in the relative safety of the post–Stalin 1970s. He was rewarded with a two-room apartment on Vasilievsky Island and membership in the prestigious writers' union.

Botvinnik was immune from the Terror. Unlike other players who were "deadly afraid" of Krylenko, he dealt with the boss of Soviet chess as an equal, according to Leonid Shamkovich. This attitude wasn't due to Botvinnik's courage, he said. "It was simply that he knew his worth and to some extent his indispensability." Others could be arrested, Shamkovich said. But "there was not another Botvinnik in the country!"

In Botvinnik's absence, Grigory Levenfish won the Tblisi tournament. He was 22 years older than Botvinnik and had made his international debut at one of the great pre–World War I Carlsbad tournaments, in August 1911, the same month Botvinnik was born. By 1937 he had replaced Romanovsky as the leader of the older generation. And he was Botvinnik's next opponent.

That summer Krylenko "announced a match between me and the championship winner" for the national title, Botvinnik said in *Achieving the Aim.* Levenfish's memoirs made clear it was his opponent who sought the match. "Not long after the end of the 10th Championship I received a challenge from Botvinnik," he wrote. Botvinnik took the match seriously. In August he played training games with Ilya Rabinovich. Five survive, a draw and a loss as White and two wins and a draw as Black. The most interesting of them was *(diagram)*:



I. Rabinovich–Botvinnik, training game, Leningrad 1937
After 44. ... Rb3

Black would win after 45. b7 — but not with 45. ... Ne8 as given by Botvinnik, since White could reply 46. Ne2 f3 47. Ng3 f2 48. Ra2! and R×f2. The real win lies in 45. ... Nd7! and then 46. Ne2 f3 47. Ng3 f2 48. Nf1 Rb1 49. Ng3 Rg1.

45. Ke5! N×h5! 46. b7 f3 47. Ra8+ Kg7 48. b8(Q) R×b8 49. R×b8 f2 50. Rb1

All this was forced. It appears White will force a draw with 51. Rf1 (or 51. Kf5) g3 52. Nh3.

50. ... Ng3!

This stops 51. Rf1 as well as 51. Kf4 f×g1(Q) 52. R×g1 Ne2+. After 50. ... Ng3 Black can win by pushing his h-pawn. But Botvinnik demonstrated how helpless White was by meeting 51. Kd5 with ... Kg6!?. White resigned.

Since Levenfish was the only one taking a risk — he held the championship title — the organizers added a provision that he would become a "Soviet grandmaster," like Botvinnik, if he won or drew the match. The match would end when someone scored six victories or when the score reached five wins to five wins. In the latter case, it would be declared drawn. In other words, Botvinnik needed to score at least 6–4 to triumph.

The first eight games were held on the stage of the Polytechnic Museum in Moscow beneath a huge portrait of Stalin. Krylenko, as chief arbiter, started Levenfish's clock at 6:30 P.M. on October 5. Curiously, it was the same day that the Euwe–Alekhine world championship match began more than 1,300 miles away in The Hague.

Match, Moscow 1937, first game
Grigory Levenfish–Botvinnik
E17 English Opening

1. c4 Nf6 2. Nc3 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. g3 Bb7 5. Bg2 Be7 6. 0–0 0–0 7. b3

Botvinnik didn't annotate any of the match games in his first game collections, perhaps to minimize the event's significance. In his three-volume version he was critical of 7. b3, saying it made sense only if White doesn't play d2–d4.

7. ... d5 8. c×d5 e×d5 9. d4 Nbd7 10. Bb2 Re8 11. Rc1

When he began to play the White side of this position Botvinnik preferred 11. Ne5, e.g. 11. ... Bd6 12. f4 or 11. ... Bf8 12. Rc1!? N×e5 13. d×e5 R×e5 14. Nb5 Re7 15. B×f6 g×f6 as in a 1951 match game with David Bronstein.

11. ... c6! 12. Qd2?! Ne4 13. Qc2 N×c3

He intended 13. ... f5 but noticed 14. N×e4! was strong (14. ... d×e4 15. Qc4+ Kh8 16. Ne5). He also felt 14. ... f×e4 was dangerous in view of 15. Ne5 N×e5 16. d×e5 Qd7 17. f4 and f4–f5. But Alexander Khalifman regarded 17. ... Bc5+ 18. Kh1 Be3 19. Rcd1 Qf5 as unclear.

14. B×c3 Bd6 15. Rfe1 Nf6 16. Nd2

Levenfish "was typified by elegant combinations, unexpected combinative blows and great energy in play," Botvinnik wrote. But his play so far has been more anti–Levenfish. Shortly after the match was announced, Levenfish indicated why in *64*: "Just two years ago Botvinnik and I were chess antipodes. But in the last years our styles underwent some

changes. Botvinnik's style of play changed by strengthening tactical moments and I in strategic moments." Nevertheless, White can't make anything of this position strictly via maneuver. He needs to play for e2–e4.

16. ... Bf8 17. Bb2 Rc8 18. Qd3

White rejected 18. f3 c5! which would have been good for Black. And 18. e4 d×e4 19. N×e4, while best, offered no more than equal chances after 19. ... Nd5 20. Nc3 R×e1+ 21. R×e1 Nb4 and ... Ba6.

18. ... Rc7 19. Rcd1 g6 20. Nb1 Bc8!

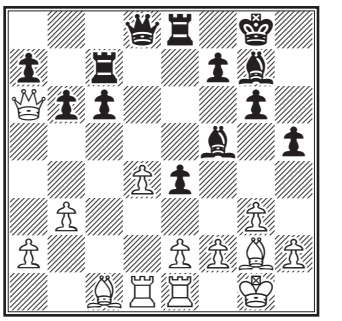
Black's last move prepares ... Bf5 so this was White's last chance to change the structure. But 21. f3 Rce7 22. e4 d×e4 23. f×e4 favors Black after 23. ... Bg4 24. Rc1 Bf5!. Worse is 21. Nc3 Bf5 22. e4 d×e4 23. N×e4 N×e4 24. B×e4 in view of 24. ... Rce7 25. f3 Qd5! 26. B×d5 R×e1+.

21. Ba3 Bf5 22. Qa6

Botvinnik pointed out that 22. Qf3? B×b1 23. B×f8 loses to 23. ... Be4. And 22. Qd2 B×b1 23. B×f8 B×a2 favors Black solidly.

22. ... Bg7 23. Nc3 h5! 24. Bc1 Ne4 25. N×e4 d×e4! *(diagram)*

Black is preparing to kill the d-pawn (... Rd7 and ... B×d4) or win on the kingside with ... h4×g3 and (or) ... e3!?. He can try both ideas, as in 26. h3 Rd7 27. Be3 B×d4 28. B×d4 R×d4 29. R×d4 Q×d4 30. Q×a7 e3!. If White has to defend the d-pawn with e2–e3, his kingside is vulnerable to ... Bg4–f3.



After 25. ... d×e4

26. h4 Rd7 27. Bg5 Bf6 28. B×f6 Q×f6 29. Qc4?!

But now White had to try 29. e3, e.g. 29. ... Bg4 30. Rc1 c5 31. R×c5.

29. ... Red8 30. Rc1 Rd6 31. Qc3!? Q×d4 32. Q×d4 R×d4 33. R×c6 Rd2 34. a4 Rb2 35. Rc3?!

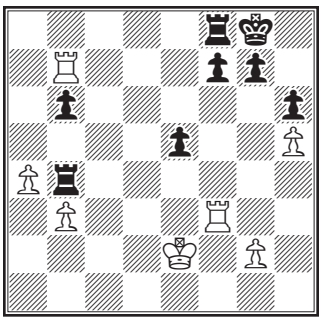
Botvinnik said the match was marred by "blunders." But this and 29. Qc4 were the most serious errors in this game. With 35. a5 or 35. Rc4 e3 36. b4 White could put up more resistance.

35. ... Rd4! 36. Re3 Rb4 37. Rc1 R2xb3 38. R×b3 R×b3 39. Rc4 Rb1+ 40. Kh2 Rb2 41. Bf1 Ra2 0–1

White didn't resume play in view of 42. Kg1 Ra1! 43. Kg2 e3! 44. f×e3 Bd7 and ... B×a4.

But Levenfish won the next two games, cheering his fans who included most of the young Muscovites, according to one of them, Yuri Averbakh. After two uneventful draws, Levenfish fell behind in development in the sixth game. Botvinnik could have converted

that to strong queenside pressure but attacked the king instead, confirming Levenfish's prematch assessment of his changing style. When that attack failed, Botvinnik found himself looking at this bleak ending *(diagram)*:



Botvinnik–Levenfish, match, Moscow 1937, sixth game
After 38. Ke2

White's drawing chances rest on lines such as 38. ... f6 39. Rg3 Rf7 40. Rb8+ Kh7 41. Rc3 and Rcc8. But even then 41. ... g6 42. Rc6 R×b3 would keep Black's hopes alive. As Levenfish put it, "I could have gone into a technical, not difficult rook endgame." But he was short of time.

38. ... e4? 39. Rc3 Rd8 40. g4!

Now 40. ... Rd3 only draws after 41. Rc8+ Kh7 42. R×f7 Rb×b3 43. Rff8!.

40. ... Rf8 41. Rbc7

White sealed this move in what Levenfish knew was a drawable position. "The thought that I had let slip a victory — and that the third loss of my opponent could have been decisive — deprived me of emotional equanimity," he wrote. "Although a draw would preserve my lead I was unsettled. After a sleepless night I tried to complicate without any foundation." Worse, he got into time pressure again.

Today, when the sealed move envelope has gone the way of the typewriter and phonograph, it's easy to imagine that all of Botvinnik's opponents treated adjournments as he did. In fact, Levenfish and others had grown up with a time control of 30 moves in two hours, followed by sealing. In other words, Botvinnik's older rivals were used to adjourning middlegames, which were very much harder to subject to the detailed move analysis that he mastered, when games were adjourned at move 40.

41. ... f5 42. Re7 f4!

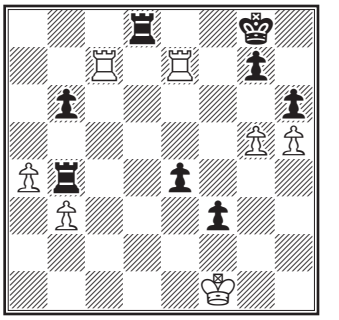
Botvinnik praised this winning try, noting that 42. ... e3 fails to 43. g5!. The key point is 43. ... h×g5? actually loses to 44. Rcc7 Rf6 45. R×g7+ Kh8 46. Rh7+ Kg8 47. h6!, a recurring theme in the moves to come. Black would only draw after 43. ... Rg4 44. g6 f4 45. Rcc7 Rg2+ 46. Kf1 Rf2+ 47. Ke1 Rd8 48. R×g7+. But it was time for Black to realize he *could lose.*

43. Rcc7 f3+ 44. Kf1!

Not 44. Ke3 R×b3+ 45. K×e4 Rb4+ and ... R×g4, winning.

44. ... Rd8! 45. g5!! *(diagram)*

Since White can draw by checks, he might as well set traps (45. ... h×g5? again allows 46. R×g7+ Kh8 47. Rh7+ Kg8 48. Rcg7+ and 49. h6!). Besides, it's good psychology to put the onus on your opponent to try to force a draw (45. ... e3! 46. R×e3 Rf4! and then 47. g6 f2 48. Rc1 Rf5).



After 45. g5

45. ... Rd1+?? 46. Kf2 Rd2+ 47. Ke1! Re2+ 48. Kf1 h×g5 49. R×g7+ 1–0

In view of 49. ... Kf8 50. h6 and 51. h7 or 51. Rc8 mate.

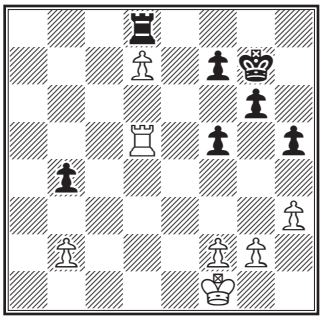
Second Half

During the Moscow half of the match, Botvinnik got an unexpected phone call in his National Hotel room. It was Sergei Kaminer, his old Petrograd Chess Assembly friend. Kaminer, by then an accomplished endgame composer, came to his room realizing he was about to be caught up in the Terror. "Here in the notebook are all my studies," he said "Take them. I fear that on me they will disappear," he told Botvinnik. He was arrested soon afterward and shot on September 27, 1938. Botvinnik secretly held onto the folder for decades and the studies were finally published in book form in 1981. Viktor Malkin said this illustrated "one of his best characteristics ... a surprising sense of obligation.... To hide a notebook of an 'enemy of the people' was dangerous but Botvinnik preserved it and published it."

Before the Levenfish match left Moscow, Botvinnik built up a two-point lead, four wins to two. But Levenfish felt optimistic. "In a match an advantage in points is not as important as in well-being. The games played showed me that I could successfully fight with Botvinnik if freed from the psychic shock of failures," he wrote. When play resumed, after a four-day break, at the House of Culture of Bakers in Leningrad, at Pravda Street, 10, he was lost — after 25 moves as White — in the ninth game. Botvinnik could have delivered the match's knockout blow. But he missed a win and then experienced the consequences of an unwritten law known to experienced players: When you fail to win a won game, you're in great danger of losing the next one.

Botvinnik lost the next *two* games. This was stunning. He had suffered four defeats in 11 match games. Against some of the world's best players, at the two Moscow internationals and Nottingham, he lost only three games out of 51.

Botvinnik came back with a nice win in the 12th game and the match stood 5–4. But under the curious rules, it was essentially tied. If he scored the next victory, it would end in his favor. But if Levenfish registered the next win, the match would end 5–5 and Levenfish would remain champion. Fans did not have to wait long *(diagram)*.



Levenfish–Botvinnik, match, Leningrad 1937, 13th game
After 41. Kf1

In this adjourned position it was clear Black would win the d-pawn but lose the b-pawn. Botvinnik analyzed 41. ... Kf6 42. Ke2 Ke6 43. Rd4 R×d7 44. R×d7 K×d7 45. Kd3 Kd6 46. Kc4 and concluded that the outside passed b-pawn after K×b4 would be fatal. He phoned the match arbiter, Nikolai Grigoriev, to resign the game and end the match.

But events took a strange turn, according to *Achieving the Aim*. Grigoriev was not only "Krylenko's right hand man," as Botvinnik put it, but also the world's leading authority on pawn studies. Grigoriev said that 45. ... f4!, rather than the defeatist 45. ... Kd6?, would set traps. For example, 46. Kc4 f3! 47. g×f3 g5 48. K×b4 f5 49. Kc4 h4! allows Black to queen (50. Kd4 g4 51. f×g4 f×g4 52. Ke4 g×h3 53. Kf3 Kc7). The best response, Grigoriev said, was 46. f3! and then 46. ... Ke6 47. Kc4 Ke5. Black's idea is 48. K×b4 Kd4! 49. Ka5 Ke3 50. b4 Kf2 and ... K×g2.

The most accurate winning line was elaborate: 48. b3! h4 49. Kc5 g5 50. Kc4 f6 51. Kc5 (to run Black out of moves) f5 52. Kc4 g4 53. Kc5 g3 54. Kc4 Kd6 55. K×b4 and now 55. ... Kd5! 56. Kc3! Kc5 57. b4+ Kb5 58. Kb3 Kb6 59. Kc4 Kc6 60. Kd4! Kb5 61. Ke5 K×b4 62. Kf4! Kc4 63. Kg5! Kd3 64. K×h4 f4 65. Kg4 Ke3 66. h4 Kf2 67. Kh3.

"Pardon me," Botvinnik claimed he said. "You are the chief arbiter and according to the match regulations the players have no right to take advice from anyone." "That is why I consider it my duty to help you," Grigoriev replied. "I happen to know that your opponent has been using the assistance of a group of masters, whereas you are on your own." But according to Botvinnik, he was adamant. His resignation stood. In his memoirs, he got some revenge by saying he had warned Grigoriev that the match conditions "would work against the more scrupulous player."

For Levenfish, the match was his greatest achievement — but also his last. He expected to be rewarded with foreign invitations. He never got them. "Many of the games were valued highly in the foreign chess press," he wrote in his memoirs. "In Hungary a book of the match games was issued in German," he added, leaving readers to wonder why there wasn't one published in the USSR.

Romanovsky summed up the match for Soviet readers in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*. "The match revealed the fighting quality of Levenfish and, on the other hand, the psychological fragility of Botvinnik," he wrote. Reading between the lines, he was saying the match was a disaster for Botvinnik. He should have won by 8½–4½, according to Arpad Elo's ratings analysis. (Elo determined that Botvinnik had become the world's best player in 1937.)

Botvinnik blamed the outcome on his underestimating Levenfish and on his time-

consuming doctoral studies. He considered Levenfish his bitter enemy afterwards and often told his friend Viktor Malkin never to mention his name. The reason, Malkin said, was that Levenfish had shown that someone who aspired to be world champion couldn't win a national championship match. It undermined "the myth of the unbeatable Botvinnik," Malkin said.

More Terror

Botvinnik's status was shaken by the match result — and Nikolai Krylenko could not help him. The boss of Soviet chess since 1924 became the next victim of the Terror.

Krylenko had remained active in chess circles and even scored a creditable 8½ points out of 15 games in a court and prosecution workers union tournament, composed of masters and first-category players, in February-March 1937. But he was denounced by a Stalin crony, Mir Dzafar Bagirov, in a January 1938 session of the Supreme Soviet for, among other things, devoting "a great deal of time to playing chess." Krylenko was arrested on January 31, convicted in April — after he confessed to being anti–Communist since before the Revolution — and was shot on July 29.

Also in July 1938, Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky was sacked from his NKVD post. How he survived the Terror has been the subject of much speculation. After all, he was an Old Bolshevik, an endangered species in the 1930s. His once-powerful brother, Fyodor, refused to be recalled from a diplomatic mission in March 1938 and wrote a denunciatory "Open Letter to Stalin." (He died a short time later, possibly at the hands of the NKVD.) Historian Sergei Morozov wrote in 2005 that Ilyin-Genevsky's mother appealed to Vyacheslav Molotov to spare his life, citing his Revolutionary services. That may have been what saved him.

Botvinnik's next tournament, in May-June 1938, was his first Soviet Championship semifinals since 1931. "I played for the sake of training, and was not entirely unsuccessful," he wrote. It was a typical Botvinnik understatement since he scored 14–3 and finished two and half points ahead of a strong field that included a new star, 25-year-old Igor Bondarevsky from near Rostov-on-Don. Several of his games, played at the Great Hall of the Ethnographic Museum tournament site, were blowouts: Botvinnik beat Genrikh Kasparian, the endgame composer, in 14 moves as White in round six, then Isaak Mazel in 13 moves as Black in round seven. And in round eight:

11th Soviet Championship Semifinals, Leningrad 1938
Botvinnik–Alexander Budo
B14 Caro-Kann Defense

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e×d5 c×d5 4. c4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e6 6. Nf3 Be7

Since 7. c5 would allow counterplay from 7. ... b6, White allows Black to transpose into a Queen's Gambit Declined.

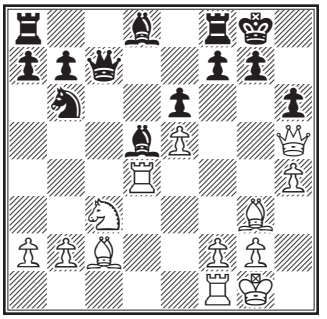
7. Bg5 d×c4 8. B×c4 0–0 9. 0–0 Nbd7 10. Qe2 Nb6 11. Bb3 Bd7 12. Rad1 Bc6 13. Ne5 Bd5 14. Bc2!

As in the Vidmar game at Nottingham, White avoids trades (14. N×d5 Nf×d5! 15. B×e7 Q×e7) and aims at the kingside.

14. ... Nfd7 15. Bf4 N×e5?

Better is 15. ... Rc8 and 16. Qd3 g6 17. Bh6 Re8 with a minor edge for White.

16. d×e5 Bg5? 17. Qh5 h6 18. Bg3!



After 20. Rd4

The idea is 19. h4 followed by Rd4–g4 and (or) Bf4×h6. Nikolai Riumin, in his notes, showed that 18. ... g6 19. B×g6 f×g6 20. Q×g6+ Kh8 21. f4 was lost.

18. ... Qc7 19. h4 Bd8 20. Rd4! *(diagram)*

Black is lost in view of 21. Rg4 Kh8 22. Bf4 followed by B×h6 or R×g7. For example, 20. ... Qc6 21. Rg4 f5 22. e×f6 B×f6 23. Q×h6.

20. ... Qc5 21. Rg4 f5 22. e×f6 R×f6 23. Be5 Bc6 24. R×g7+! 1–0

On 24. ... Kf8 (not 24. ... K×g7 25. B×f6+ and Q×c5) White should avoid 25. Rf7+ R×f7 26. Bg7+ R×g7 27. Q×c5+ Be7 in favor of just 25. b4 or 25. Rh7.

Midway through the tournament word came that Alekhine, who had regained his title, had signed an agreement with Salo Flohr to play a world championship match in Czechoslovakia. It seemed Botvinnik would have to wait until after that match in the fall of 1939 to make his own move.

AVRO

In October Botvinnik played training games with Ragozin to test the Ragozin Variation as White (scoring 1½–½) and the French and Grünfeld Defenses as Black (2–0). This was in preparation for one of the greatest tournaments in history, AVRO, held at various Dutch cities in November.

How he came to be invited — and how Levenfish was not — is controversial. "It's a well-known story," Viktor Korchnoi said in 1995 (in English). "Botvinnik contacted the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the ruling organ of the country, and informed them that a person who had formed himself, who was brought up as a chess player in Tsarist Russia, could not represent the Soviet Union in the world arena. That is a well-known fact."

In his memoirs Levenfish didn't reveal what happened but said he deserved to be invited. When he wasn't sent to the Netherlands it was a "moral knockout" that made him realize that he would never reach his potential as a player.

David Bronstein said Levenfish told him that Capablanca "personally sent him an

invitation to the AVRO tournament but Botvinnik interfered in the matter." Organizers of foreign international tournaments usually extended invitations directly ("personally") or through a player's national chess federation. Bronstein's account is plausible because Capablanca, who met Levenfish at the two Moscow internationals, would have been a natural conduit for a personal invitation.

Botvinnik indicated in *Achieving the Aim,* that the decision was made by the *vlasti*: "Levenfish tried to insist that he represent the Soviet Union, but he was not supported and I was assigned to play...." His nephew Igor, responding to Korchnoi, said that Botvinnik told him, "I received a personal invitation and Levenfish ran everywhere and complained that he should be sent." Igor called Levenfish's version a "legend," and said it was natural that Dutch organizers, seeking the strongest players in the world, would choose the Soviet who had starred at the two Moscow internationals and at Nottingham.

Botvinnik said there was a last-minute hitch before AVRO when he and Gayane traveled from Leningrad to Moscow to pick up their passports at the Sports Committee office. Only his was available. "We were in a depressed mood." Would he have gone without Ganochka? The question was never answered. Once again his connections paid off. Sports Committee at that time fell under the jurisdiction of Nikolai Bulganin, who had just been promoted to Deputy Prime Minister and was also head of the State Bank of the Soviet Union. In a stroke of luck, Botvinnik had met Bulganin, then on a diplomatic mission, while Botvinnik was in Paris on his way back from Nottingham. He called the bank office and was told his passport problem would be relayed to Bulganin. The next morning he and Gayane were surprised to find everything in order.

On arrival in Amsterdam after what he called "a dangerous trip, through Fascist Germany," Botvinnik learned that all the invitees had to sign contracts pledging to abide by the playing schedule. They didn't appreciate the toll of traveling to ten different cities over three weeks, he said. He called it the "very worst" conditions he ever played in. Reuben Fine, however, said Botvinnik's "absurd" criticisms were just his way of excusing his failure to win the tournament. "He alibied by making up a story that on playing days the masters got nothing to eat and that the excessive traveling (in Holland!) tired him out too much," Fine wrote.

Botvinnik looked tired in the first round when he lost to Fine in an offbeat Winawer French (1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. d×c5!?). A series of draws, including his first game in the three-decade rivalry with Paul Keres, was interrupted by a victory over another American.

AVRO, Rotterdam 1938
Botvinnik–Samuel Reshevsky
A25 English Opening

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nc6 3. g3 g6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. e3 d6 6. Nge2 Nge7 7. d4 e×d4!? 8. e×d4 0–0 9. 0–0 Nf5

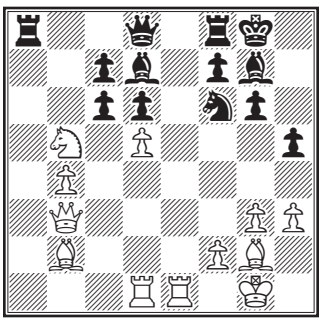
Botvinnik blamed "the dogmatic rule" about a bishop's superiority to a knight for Black's rejecting the equalizing 9. ... Bg4 10. h3 B×e2 11. N×e2 Nf5 (12. d5 Ne5).

10. d5 Ne5 11. b3 a5 12. Bb2 Nd7 13. a3 Nc5?

Botvinnik also faulted Black's dark-square plan, in place of 11. ... a6 and 12. ... b5. But 13. ... Ne5! would offer good chances (14. Qd2? a4! 15. N×a4 N×c4).

14. b4! Nd7 15. Qb3 Nd4

"A serious mistake, after which White's advantage becomes obvious," he wrote in his first notes, which said 15. ... a×b4 16. a×b4 R×a1 was necessary. Now White centralizes strongly.



After 23. ... b×c6

16. N×d4 B×d4 17. Rad1 Bg7 18. Rfe1 a×b4 19. a×b4 Nf6 20. h3 h5 21. c5! Bf5 22. Nb5 Bd7 23. c6 b×c6 *(diagram)*

"After this, White's victory is only a question of time," he wrote.

24. d×c6 Bc8?

But this is the real turning point. Botvinnik correctly pointed out that 24. ... Be6 could be punished by a strong sacrifice, 25. R×e6! f×e6 26. Nd4. For example, 26. ... Qe7 27. N×e6 Qf7 28. B×f6 B×f6 29. Bd5 Kh8 30. Nf4 Qg7 31. Qd3 or 28. ... Q×f6 29. N×f8+ K×f8 30. Rd3."Other moves of the bishop are no better," wrote Ludek Pachman, citing 24. ... Bf5 25. Nd4 Qc8 26. Re7. No one seems to have noticed 24. ... Bf5! and then 25. Nd4 Bc8!, with only a minor advantage, until Alexander Khalifman annotated the game.

25. N×d6! Be6?

Black may be lost after 25. ... c×d6 26. c7 Q×c7 27. B×a8 B×h3 28. Bh1 but there's a lot of game left.

26. R×e6! f×e6 27. Nf5! Qe8

A final error. "Those who like sacrificing their queen would undoubtedly have preferred 27. ... Q×d1+ 28. Q×d1 e×f5 but White's queenside pawns would have immediately begun advancing (for example 29. b5 Rab8 30. Qb3+ and 31. Bd4 followed by b5–b6)," he wrote. Yet Black still has chances in that line after 30. ... Kh7 31. Bd4 Ne4! and 32. Ba7 Rbe8, notes Khalifman (33. b6? Bd4 favors Black and 33. Be3 Be5 34. b6 c×b6 35. B×b6 Rb8 remains a fight).

28. N×g7 K×g7 29. Rd7+ Rf7 30. Be5!

This decides (30. ... Rc8 31. Qf3) and is faster than 30. Qf3 e5!.

30. ... Kg8 31. R×c7 R×c7 32. B×c7 Ra1+ 33. Kh2 Ra7 34. Be5 Rf7 35. c7 Nd7 36. Qc2! Rf8 37. c8(Q) 1–0

"The older players like Capablanca could not stand up to the strain" of the schedule, Botvinnik wrote in his memoirs. Alekhine had "become flabby" since he last saw him at

Nottingham and found the constant train travel "hard going." In round seven Botvinnik adjourned in a won but materially equal endgame against the exile. When Botvinnik dropped by Salo Flohr's hotel room, he found Savielly Tartakower and others playing cards.

"Hasn't he resigned yet?" Flohr asked.

"Who is he?" asked Tartakower, who was covering the tournament for the leading Dutch newspaper, *De Telegraaf.*

"Well, Alekhine is in a bad way" was the answer.

"You're joking," said Tartakower — who had filed a report saying the likely result of Botvinnik–Alekhine was a draw. He quickly called the paper and said, "Don't change anything — but just write that it is time for Black to resign." Alekhine resumed play but conceded on the 51st move.

Meanwhile, Fine was setting a furious pace. Botvinnik's chances of catching him were nearly doomed by this round ten game.

AVRO, Arnheim 1938
Samuel Reshevsky–Botvinnik
E46 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 0–0 5. Ne2 d5 6. a3 Be7 7. c×d5 N×d5!

Databases indicate that this common-sense recapture was first played in this game. "I intuitively found the correct answer," Botvinnik wrote. The knight trade reduces White's attacking chances.

8. N×d5 e×d5 9. g3 Nd7 10. Bg2 Nf6 11. 0–0 Bd6 12. Nc3 c6 13. b4 a6 14. Re1 Re8 15. Bb2 Bf8

"Reshevsky was thinking so long about his moves that, openly speaking, I didn't hurry to force the course of the struggle," he wrote.

16. Qd3 Be6 17. f3 Nd7 18. Na4

Black, preparing ... Nb6–c4, would have met 18. e4 d×e4 19. f×e4 with 19. ... Ne5! (20. d×e5 Q×d3) 20. Qd1 Bg4, as cited by Reshevsky.

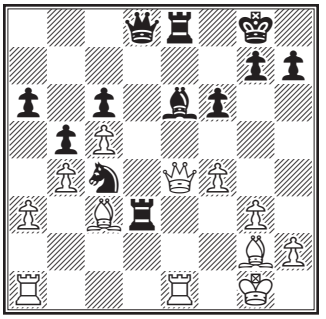
18. ... b6! 19. Rac1 b5!

Black intended 19. ... c5 but once White's rook was lured from the a-file he locked the position with ... b5. "Black appears to have lost time, but actually he has gained it," Reshevsky wrote in his game collection.

20. Nc5 Nb6 21. Bc3 Ra7! 22. e4 Nc4 23. Ra1 B×c5!

"Few players would have been prepared to part with what is apparently Black's more effective bishop," Reshevsky wrote.

24. d×c5 Rd7 25. Qd4 f6 26. f4?



After 27. ... Rd3

He blamed the sharp decline in his position on this. Better was 26. Bf1 Ne5 27. Be2.

26. ... d×e4 27. Q×e4 Rd3! *(diagram)*

Black finds a remarkable resource that embarrasses the White queen (28. Q×c6 Bd7! or 28. Rec1 Bf7! 29. Qf5 R×c3! 30. R×c3 Qd4+). But in his chronic time pressure, Reshevsky is equal to the task.

28. Rac1 R×c3! 29. R×c3 Bf7 30. Rd3!

This sacrifice is better than 30. R×c4 b×c4! because the passed pawn would become a monster after 31. Qb1 Qd4+ 32. Kh1 R×e1+ 33. Q×e1 c3!. After the text, best is 30. ... Qc8! 31. Red1! R×e4 32. B×e4 Bd5 33. B×d5+ c×d5 34. R×d5 Qg4 and Black wins, according to Botvinnik. But Khalifman said 35. c6 Nb6 36. Rd8+ Kf7 37. c7 isn't so clear.

30. ... Qb8?? 31. Red1! R×e4 32. B×e4 Qf8

Suddenly Black is lost, e.g. 32. ... Bd5 33. B×d5+ c×d5 34. R×d5 and Rd8+. Compared with 30. ... Qc8 there is no 34. ... Qg4!.

33. Rd8 Be8 34. Rde1! Kf7 35. B×h7 Ne5!

A brilliant defense. Among the cute ways to lose was 35. ... Qh8 36. Bf5 N×a3 37. Be6+ Kg6 38. f5+ Kg5 39. h4+ Kh5 40. Bf7+.

36. f×e5 Qh8 37. Bc2?

The was too little time to choose among too many ways to win. With 37. e×f6 Q×h7 38. Rd×e8 K×f6 39. R8e6+ Kf7 40. R×c6 White has a plodding win. The Web site www.truechess.com offers a faster 37. Be4 Ke7 38. Rc8 Qh5 39. e×f6+ K×f6 40. Bg2 (and 40. ... Bd7 41. Rf8+ Kg6 42. Be4+). A key point is that unlike the game, 38. ... f5 loses simply to 39. B×c6.

37. ... Ke7! 38. Rc8?

"The square e8 apparently is 'fatal' for White," Botvinnik wrote, recalling how 30. ... Qc8! would have won. Here 38. Ra8! does it: 38. ... f5 39. B×f5 Qh5 40. Ra7+ Kd8 41. g4 Qg5 42. Rd1+, for example.

38. ... f5! 39. B×f5 Qh5 40. g4

Reshevsky felt he still had winning chances, with 40. Be4 (40. ... Q×e5?? 41. R×e8+).

40. ... Qg5 41. Rc7+ Kd8

The difference from the 38. Ra8 line is that the rook at c7 is under attack, and there is no time for 42. Rd1+.

42. Rc8+ Ke7 43. e6 g6 44. Rc7+ Kd8 45. Rd7+! Kc8!

Not 45. ... B×d7?? 46. e7+! Kc7 47. B×d7.

46. e7 g×f5 47. Rd8+ Kc7 48. R×e8 Q×g4+ 49. Kh1 Qf3+ 50. Kg1 Qg4+ Draw

Sergei Prokofiev took on the role of chess correspondent for TASS, the Soviet news agency, during AVRO. "A brilliant tournament," the composer wrote. "Caution is expected (but) the champions are playing like animals. And most of all in this hand-to-hand fighting the cold-bloodedness of our Botvinnik is striking."

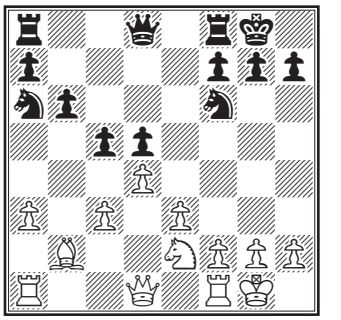
A day after the Reshevsky draw, Botvinnik faced Capablanca for the eighth and last time. The Cuban had just celebrated his 50th birthday and was showing signs of the hypertension that would kill him in less than four years.

AVRO, Amsterdam 1938
Botvinnik–José Capablanca
E46 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 d5 5. a3!

Since White can dissolve doubled pawns with c×d5 after 4. ... d5, it's a marvel that no one seems to have played 5. a3! before. Thanks to this transpositional trick, White now gets a superior version of Fritz Sämisch's 4. a3.

5. ... B×c3+ 6. b×c3 c5 7. c×d5 e×d5 8. Bd3 0–0 9. Ne2 b6 10. 0–0 Ba6 11. B×a6 N×a6 12. Bb2 *(diagram)*



After 12. Bb2

Because of this game, this piece became known in similar positions as the "Botvinnik bishop," one that is hemmed in by pawns but holds great potential energy. However, Black could have mobilized his heavy pieces with 12. Bb2 Qd7! 13. Qd3 Qa4! or 13. a4 c×d4! 14. c×d4 Rfc8 and ... Rc4. Better is the more accurate 12. Qd3! Qc8 (or 12. ... Nc7) 13. f3!.

Eight years later Botvinnik tried 10. a4 against Hugh Alexander in a USSR–Great Britain radio match and won a remarkably similar game after 10. ... Ba6 11. B×a6 N×a6 12. Ba3 Re8 13. Qd3 c4 14. Qc2 Qd7 15. 0–0 Nb8 16. Rae1 Nc6 17. Ng3 Na5 18. f3 Nb3 19. e4 Q×a4 20. Qb2 a5 21. e5 b5? 22. Bd6 Re6? 23. e×f6! R×d6 24. f×g7 b4 25. Re5! Re8 26. f4! and so on.

12. ... Qd7! 13. a4 Rfe8?! 14. Qd3 c4?

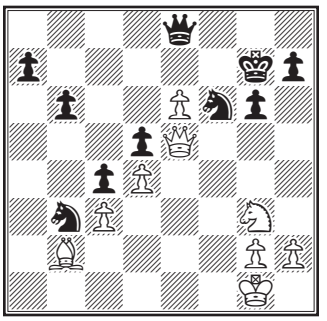
This bets on counterplay from a knight maneuver to b3. Better was 14. ... Qb7.

15. Qc2 Nb8 16. Rae1! Nc6 17. Ng3 Na5 18. f3!

White correctly feels that a kingside attack is worth a pawn.

18. ... Nb3 19. e4 Q×a4 20. e5 Nd7 21. Qf2!

White avoids 21. ... Nbc5!, which would rescue Black's queenside pieces, and he prepares Nf5 followed by Nd6 or Qg3.



After 29. Qe5

21. ... g6 22. f4 f5 23. e×f6 N×f6 24. f5! R×e1 25. R×e1 Re8!

Setting the trap of 26. f×g6 h×g6 27. Q×f6? R×e1+ 28. Kf2 Qe8! and wins.

26. Re6! R×e6 27. f×e6 Kg7 28. Qf4! Qe8 29. Qe5 *(diagram)*

In 1988 a master named Vladimir Goldin showed that 29. ... h6! is best and then 30. Ba3 Qd8. But he found that White is still winning after 31. Qf4!, with the idea of Bc1 and Q×h6+ as well as h2–h4–h5. The variations are complex and numerous but this gives a taste of them: 31. ... b5 32. h4 a5 33. Qe5! Qb6? 34. Bf8+! K×f8 35. Q×f6+ and wins.

Or 33. ... b4 34. e7! Qe8 35. c×b4 c3! 36. h5! c2 37. b×a5 c1(Q)+ 38. B×c1 N×c1 39. a6! Nd3 40. Qc7 and the a-pawn queens after Qb7.

29. ... Qe7? 30. Ba3!

In the spring of 1979, when Botvinnik was deeply involved in his computer program Pioneer, he tested it with the position after 29. ... Qe7. "Alas, the very first move that Pioneer included in the analysis, to my annoyance, was 30. Nf5+," he wrote. He came to an odd conclusion. The goal in chess is to execute a "generalized exchange," that is, a relative gain in material or position, he said. In this case Black's best piece was the queen *while it was at e7*. White's least valuable piece is the bishop at b2.

Therefore, 30. Ba3 Q×a3 is the kind of "generalized exchange" that "increases the strength" of White's forces, he said. So Botvinnik added this "generalized exchange" concept to the algorithm. When Pioneer was tested again on July 5, 1979, its first line of analysis was 30. Ba3, he said.

30. ... Q×a3 31. Nh5+! g×h5 32. Qg5+ Kf8 33. Q×f6+ Kg8

"The position was won. I sat there and thought about the most accurate move order," Botvinnik wrote in *Achieving the Aim*. "Capablanca maintained an external show of calm while walking about the stage. Euwe came up to him and asked him how he stood. Capa used his hands to express that anything was still possible." This was an act to deceive "his tired opponent," Botvinnik wrote. Contrary to what had been supposed for decades, he hadn't worked out the combination to ten or more moves. Botvinnik revealed in *Half a Century of Chess* that he had only calculated up to this point, when he knew he had perpetual check, if he needed it, and could examine two possible winning tries, 34. e7 and 34. Qf7+ Kh8 35. e7.

In his first game collections he said only one line wins, because the latter allows perpetual check, 35. ... Qc1+ 36. Kf2 Qd2+ 37. Kg3 Q×c3+ 38. Kh4 Q×d4+ 39. K×h5 Qe5+.

He was right, but for the wrong reason. A Russian amateur pointed out that White can win after 40. Kg4 Qe4+ 41. Kh3 Qe3+ 42. g3 Qh6+ 43. Kg2 Qd2+ 44. Qf2!. But Black can draw much earlier with 37. ... Qg5+! (not 37. ... Q×c3+) 38. Kf3 N×d4+! 39. c×d4 Qg4+, as another amateur pointed. Other amateurs found a clear win with 34. Qf7+ Kh8 35. g3!, so the king can escape to h3. But that's hardly as pretty as the game.

34. e7 Qc1+ 35. Kf2 Qc2+ 36. Kg3 Qd3+ 37. Kh4 Qe4+ 38. K×h5 Qe2+ 39. Kh4 Qe4+ 40. g4 Qe1+ 41. Kh5 1–0

Feeling exhausted after a game was a good sign because it meant you had exerted yourself to the utmost, Botvinnik felt. After this game, "I couldn't get up from my chair," he recalled. In *Half a Century of Chess* he added, "I could hardly stand on my feet. My wife took me to a snack bar which had already closed." But "the barman took pity on me and a ham sandwich brought me back to life."

The postmortem continues. In 2005, Russian master Sergei Rozenberg showed that 30. Ba3 wasn't the only win. He demonstrated in *64* how 30. h4! also does the trick, e.g. 30. ... Nd2 31. Bc1 Ne4 32. N×e4 d×e4 33. g4 and 30. ... h5 31. Ne2! followed by Nf4 and Qg5.

The game was one of 60 that appeared in Botvinnik's first collection *Selected Games,* covering 1926 to 1938, with a modest circulation of 10,000 copies. Most people in the West are familiar with the translation of the 1949 version, with 100 games.

Stalin's Style

Botvinnik rounded out the tournament with three draws and finished a highly creditable third, behind Keres and Fine. That left the world championship uncertain. Alekhine's contract to play Flohr was in doubt because of Czech–German tensions. It was widely assumed that AVRO was to be a candidates tournament to determine Alekhine's next challenger. But at the opening ceremony he declared he was not bound to play the tournament winner. He also reiterated his offer to play any worthy candidate who could assure a $10,000 prize fund (except for Capablanca, who would need the $10,000 in gold, the equivalent of $18,000).

Alekhine's words told Botvinnik he had to act while he was still in the Netherlands. "It was not known when I would see Alekhine again," he recalled. But he needed some assurance from Alekhine, as well as from Moscow, that a match was possible. Botvinnik's connections again paid off. He reached the deputy director of Exportkhleb, the Soviet agency that sold grain, bread and similar products to Europe, "and received full backing." He confirmed this backing with the Soviet plenipotentiary in Belgium, Evgeny Rubinin, who attended the last AVRO round and represented "Soviet power for me."

Alekhine's motives were mixed. He had made known his wish to return to his homeland at least five years before. A championship match would be a perfect excuse for the Soviets to forget his anti–Communist past. And Alekhine needed money. He had made little of it in his championship matches of 1934, 1935 and 1937.

Botvinnik told Alekhine on the final day of the tournament that he wanted to talk. Alekhine agreed to see him the next day, at 4 P.M., at the Carlton Hotel, where he was staying. Botvinnik brought along Flohr, as a witness. One wonders how the Czech felt while his own world championship aspirations were being dashed. Botvinnik said he invited him because he supposed that "Flohr would be above petty egoism."

As they sipped tea, Alekhine and Botvinnik reached an unofficial agreement in half an hour: Botvinnik could choose the playing site, which could be in any European country (except Holland). But the presumption is that it would be in Moscow. Alekhine would be invited to a Moscow tournament to get acclimated three months or four months before the first match game. The prize fund would be $10,000, two-thirds going to Alekhine regardless of result. They agreed to keep the matter "strictly secret" until final details were agreed and an official match challenge was announced by the Soviet side. The challenge would be sent to a South American address because "Alekhine was intending to buy land in Trinidad," he wrote. Alekhine hedged his bets by having another meeting that day — with Keres, who was about to leave the Netherlands. Alekhine was 15 minutes late for it and it wasn't until seven years later that Keres learned the reason: Alekhine had been busy at the Carlton making his agreement with Botvinnik.

Botvinnik and Alekhine's other potential challengers met after the tournament, "on the initiative of the organizers," Botvinnik said. They "unanimously authorized" Fine and Euwe to draw up proposals for future championships, according to *Analytical*. But they were trying to make rules that Alekhine and Botvinnik had just agreed to ignore.

Botvinnik returned to Moscow feeling somewhat triumphant. He was granted a face-to-face meeting with Bulganin where he explained the Alekhine situation. Bulganin, who became Soviet premier during the Khrushchev era, told him to write the details in a letter to the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars "and I will report in person." The chairman was Vyacheslav Molotov, then the No. 2 figure in Stalin's government. Botvinnik returned to Leningrad. After the New Year he was suffering from a serious mouth inflammation, stomatisis. His temperature was 104 Fahrenheit when a courier arrived with a telegram:

"If you decide to challenge chessplayer Alekhine to a match we wish you complete success. The rest can be easily guaranteed. Molotov." It was the blank check, the guaranteed backing of the Party and state he needed to become world champion.

Botvinnik concluded that the telegram wasn't written by Molotov but by Stalin himself. "This was his style."

7. Absolution

In his various memoirs Mikhail Botvinnik left out one remarkable detail. It was hardly a secret since it was announced in the May 1938 issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR:* A month before, Sports Committee's chess section, in a plenary session, "strongly denounced" its previous leadership for, among other things, "the loss of political vigilance." It added, "M.M. Botvinnik was elected chairman of the section." He had succeeded Nikolai Krylenko as the boss of Soviet chess.

But his leadership didn't last long, apparently because of his "hard character." Botvinnik had almost nothing to do with the section office and "quickly spoiled his relations with leading chessplayers," according to historian Sergei Voronkov, based on information from Yuri Averbakh.

There were more changes to come. By early 1939 a new Sports Committee head, V.V. Snegov, and a new chess section chairman, Vladimir Nikolayevich Snegiriev, were named. Botvinnik, in *Achieving the Aim,* said he went to Moscow to meet them. It didn't go well. Snegov, he concluded, opposed a championship match with Alekhine. Botvinnik concluded this stemmed from the "jealousy" of his rivals.

And Snegiriev, a first-category player, suggested to him a new chess section slogan, "Catch up with Botvinnik." Strangely, this offended him. "Up until now I had considered that I should win the world championship for the Soviet Union," he wrote. "Now, it seemed, the 27-year-old grandmaster ought to play no more strongly than his comrades!"

Botvinnik got a chance to prove he could play "more strongly than his comrades" in the 11th Soviet Championship in April–May 1939. He thought his main rivals would be Igor Bondarevsky and Vladimir Makagonov. The other players tended to be either unproven youngsters or over-the-hill veterans. Pyotr Romanovsky, for example, won only one game, dropped out with three games to play and finished last.

11th Soviet Championship, Leningrad 1939
Ilya Rabinovich–Botvinnik
C19 French Defense

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 B×c3+ 6. b×c3 Ne7 7. Nf3

White "has two bishops and more space; sometimes he can take advantage of the

weakness of the d6-square," Botvinnik said of the Winawer Variation. "His problem is doubled pawns on the c-file. Black might play ... c4 at an appropriate moment, closing the position and limiting the two bishops." He summed up: "Chances are equal but play might get very sharp. Doesn't it make this system ideal for a modern chessplayer?"

7. ... Nbc6 8. Bd3 Qa5 9. Qd2 c4 10. Be2 Bd7

Botvinnik called his last move "a serious error" and he adopted the space-grabbing 10. ... Qa4 nine rounds later against Iosif Pogrebyssky. His opponent, a many-time champion of Ukraine from Kiev, had mastered 10 languages, earned a math-physics doctorate and had little time for chess. Nevertheless, Pogrebyssky came up with an original idea, 11. 0–0 Bd7 12. Ng5! h6 13. Nh3.

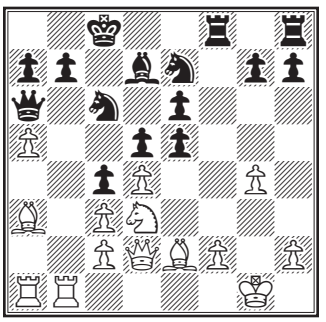
But he failed to appreciate that White should continue Nf4–h5 to attack g7. Instead, he met 13. ... 0–0–0 with 14. f4? and was worse after 14. ... f6 15. Nf2 h5! 16. Nd1 Nf5 17. Nb2 Qa5 18. a4 g5! (19. f×g5? f×e5!).

11. a4! f6 12. Ba3 0–0–0 13. 0–0 Nf5 14. g4!? Nfe7 15. Rfb1 Qa6?

"This is wrong," Botvinnik wrote. "White had no real threats on the b-file yet. Black should have played 15. ... Rdf8 and the weakness of the f4-square would give him good play."

16. a5! Rdf8 17. Ne1?

White's 16th move prepared a killing Ne1–d3–c5. But he should have inserted 17. Bd6 and maneuvered his queen to a3 first. For example, 17. ... Rf7 18. Qc1 h5 19. Ne1! Nd8 20. Qa3 Ng6 21. Nd3! is strong because 21. ... c×d3 22. B×d3 traps the queen. Botvinnik indicated he would have sacrificed, 17. ... f×e5 18. d×e5 Ng6!? 19. B×f8 R×f8 20. Qe3 Rf4, when "White cannot claim that his material advantage would give him a win."



After 18. Nd3

17. ... f×e5 18. Nd3? *(diagram)*

Botvinnik added that 18. d×e5 Rf7 19. Bd6 was right but not enough for a White edge after 19. ... Ng6 20. Qe3 Nf4 21. Bf3 g5.

18. ... c×d3! 19. B×d3 Q×a5 20. B×e7 Qc7 21. B×f8 R×f8 22. Bb5

In the tournament book, Botvinnik wrote, "Black's chances are at least equal." He changed that to White is "worse" in his game collections.

22. ... Rf4 23. h3 a6 24. B×c6 B×c6 25. Re1 e4!

Here he claimed, a bit over-optimistically, that White is lost and should have played 25. d×e5 to stop ... e4. He felt Black would stand clearly better after 25. ... Rf3 26. Qd4 R×h3 because of threats to bring his queen to the kingside (not 25. ... Q×e5 26. Re1 Qf6 27. R×e6! R×g4+ 28. h×g4 Q×e6 29. Qd4 and White is back on top).

26. Re3 Bb5 27. Rg3 g5 28. Kg2 Qf7 29. Qe3 Qf6 30. Re1 Be8 31. Qe2

He said 31. f3 "could be met by 31. ... Bg6." But after 32. f×e4 B×e4+ 33. Kg1, Black still has to find a knockout. In the game he has a simple plan of squeezing the kingside while preparing to push the a-pawn.

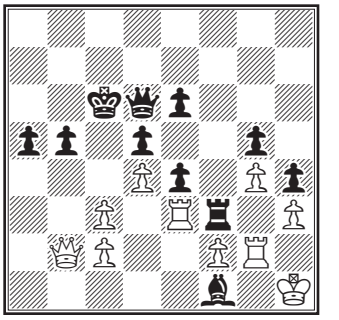
31. ... Kb8 32. Rb1 Bb5 33. Qe3 Be8 34. Qe2 Kc7 35. Rh1 Bg6 36. Re1 Be8 37. Rh1 h5!

Black artfully uses tactics (38. g×h5 B×h5! 39. Q×h5 R×f2 40. Kg1 Rf1+ 42. Kh2 Qf2+ 43. Rg2 Qf4+ and mates) while shutting out the White's rooks. Now ... h4! can't be avoided.

38. Kg1 Bb5 39. Qe1 h4! 40. Re3 Bc4 41. Rh2 b6 42. Qa1 Qf8 43. Rg2 a5 44. Qa4 Qe7 45. Qa1 Kb7 46. Qa4 Rf8 47. Re1 Qd6 48. Qa1 Ka6 49. Re3 b5 50. Qb2 Rf3! 51. Kh1 Rf6

Botvinnik felt White's last was "the only move" in view of 51. R×f3 e×f3 52. Rh2 a4 53. Qb4 Q×b4 54. c×b4 Bf1! and the a-pawn marches on. However, White's position isn't that bad after 51. Qc1! Qf4 52. Qe1. Note that instead of 51. ... Rf6 he could have won immediately with 51. ... R×e3! 52. f×e3 Bf1, e.g. 53. Rf2 B×h3 54. c4 d×c4 55. c3 B×g4 (Khalifman).

52. Kg1 Kb6 53. Rh2 Rf7 54. Rg2 Rf3 55. Kh1 Rf8 56. Kg1 Rf6 57. Rh2 Kc7 58. Rg2 Rf3 59. Kh1? Bf1! *(diagram)*



After 59. ... Bf1

Once again White had a better defense in 59. Qc1 Qf4 60. Qe1. Now he's lost because of the a-pawn (60. Rh2 a4).

After Botvinnik retired, he was profiled by Mikhail Beilin in a magazine article. Beilin wanted to include three of his most famous attacking games: against Riumin at Moscow 1935, Capablanca at AVRO 1938 and Keres at the Absolute Championship. "Why not one positional game?" Botvinnik asked, and he recommended including this one.

60. R×f3 e×f3!

This is simpler than the queen endgame (60. ... B×g2+ 61. K×g2 e×f3+ 62. Kg1 a4 63. Qc1). Why did Black take time to get his king to c6? That's revealed in 61. Rg1 B×h3 62. Qc1 Bg2+ 63. R×g2 f×g2+ 64. K×g2 Qf4! 65. Q×f4 g×f4 66. g5 Kd6!. The g-pawn can be caught but the a-pawn can't.

61. Rh2 a4 62. Kg1 a3 63. Qc1 Bc4 64. Q×g5 a2 65. Qc1 e5! 66. d×e5 Q×e5 67. Qa1 Qe2 0–1

After three rounds the unlikely leader, with a perfect score, was Alexander Kotov, 25. He had never played in a Soviet Championship — or any strong tournament, for that matter. Three years before, Kotov was a first-category player who had vowed to give up

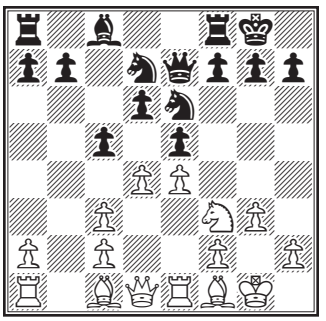
chess if he didn't become a master by the time he was 30. He did achieve that rank in 1938, thanks to improving his calculation. But Botvinnik was unimpressed: "Can much be expected of a player who only at 24 achieves a master result?"

Kotov was highly erratic. "They called him Robin Hood. He took points from the strong and gave them to the weak!" Yuri Averbakh said. For example, when the Soviets won 19½–½ in a match with lowly Paraguay in 1954 Kotov made the only draw. But on some days he could beat anyone.

On the morning of the fourth round Kotov woke up with a temperature over 104 degrees Fahrenheit, "delirium" and, he wrote in his memoirs, what doctors called a severe tonsil infection. (After the tournament he spent two months in bed recovering, he claimed.) But like Botvinnik in the "Euwe/Kmoch" tournament five years before, Kotov decided not to drop out. And remarkably, he kept pace with Botvinnik. This was not supposed to happen to the man Molotov had guaranteed support for a world championship match.

In rounds nine and ten Botvinnik played two middlegames as White featuring doubled c-pawns. One of them, against Ilya Kan, found its way into several textbooks. But the other game was nearly as instructive.

11th Soviet Championship, Leningrad 1939
Botvinnik–Vasily Panov
C49 Four Knights Game



After 13. ... c5

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bb5 Bb4 5. 0–0 0–0 6. d3 B×c3 7. b×c3 d6 8. Bg5 Qe7 9. Re1 Nd8 10. d4 Ne6 11. Bc1 c6 12. Bf1 Nd7 13. g3 c5 *(diagram)*

Black has carried out the "Metger unpin" (... Nd8–e6) to drive White's dark-squared bishop off its best diagonal. The usual counter was d4–d5 and kingside pressure such as with Nh4–f5 and f2–f4. For example, 14. Rb1 b6 15. d5 Nc7 16. Nh4. Botvinnik prefers to exploit the hole created by Black's last move.

14. d×e5!? d×e5 15. Nh4! g6 16. Ng2

The knight is headed for d5, where it will be reinforced by c3–c4.

16. ... Ng7 17. Ne3 Nf6 18. Bg2 Be6 19. c4! Rad8 20. Qe2!

Not the natural 20. Nd5 B×d5! 21. c×d5 because Black can blockade with ... Ne8–d6 and equalize.

20. ... Nd7 21. Bb2 f6 22. f4 Rde8?

Black has made some inexact moves (14. ... N×e5 and a trade of knights would have helped). But this move is the closest he comes to a real error before his position is critical. Counterplay with 22. ... e×f4! 23. g×f4 Nh5 was needed, e.g. 24. Qf2 Qd6 25. Nd5 Qa6.

23. Rad1 b6 24. Rd2!

White has a decisive plan in mind: Doubling rooks coupled with Ng4 and perhaps f4–f5×g6 and Bh3. Black reacts too late.

24. ... e×f4 25. g×f4 g5! 26. f×g5 f×g5 27. e5! Qf7 28. Nd5 Nh5 29. Rf1 Nf4 30. Qe4 Qf5?

Black would still be in the game after 30. ... Bf5 or 30. ... B×d5 and ... Qg7.

31. Q×f5 B×f5 32. N×f4 g×f4 33. Bd5+ Kg7 34. e6+ Nf6 35. R×f4 Kg6 36. Rg2+ Ng4 37. Rg×g4+ B×g4 38. R×g4+ Kf5 39. Rg3 Rg8 40. Bg7 Re7 41. Bf8! 1–0

In the penultimate round, Kotov faced Pyotr Dubinin, a giant of 6-foot-2 and 250-plus pounds. Kotov, barely over 5-foot, recalled, "He usually walked across the stage with caution, as if he feared he would crush one of the players, especially someone short like me." But Kotov, like Botvinnik, had learned to study his opponents. He noticed that Dubinin had stature but not stamina, and could be beaten in a long game. Kotov adjourned twice with a drawish rook endgame and won on the 111th move. He and Botvinnik were tied on the eve of the final round.

The night "was probably one of the most difficult in the life of Botvinnik," wrote Sergei Voronkov. "At stake was not simply the title of champion of the USSR but the fate of a world championship match!"

The reason is that Alekhine couldn't be pinned down on details. An official match challenge had not been issued. And it might *not* be issued if Botvinnik failed to prove again that he was the best Soviet player. For Kotov there was less at stake. His friends advised him to play quietly because a tie for the national title "would be a colossal success," he wrote. Botvinnik understood him better.

11th Soviet Championship, Leningrad 1939
Alexander Kotov–Botvinnik
E33 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. Qc2 Nc6 5. Nf3 d5 6. e3 0–0 7. a3 B×c3+ 8. Q×c3 Bd7

Botvinnik had scored a spectacular 5½ points out of 7 as Black in the tournament. Nevertheless he spent much of the previous 24 hours trying to find the right answer to 1. d4. He chose Ragozin's system (which usually comes about via 1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Nf3 Bb4 and then 5. Qc2 Nc6 6. e3 0–0) in order to get quick development. It's a good weapon psychologically because White should nurse his two-bishop edge slowly and not open the position prematurely. But he guessed Kotov would play "energetically for a win (it is so very tempting to try and become champion of the country!)."

9. b3 a5 10. Bd3

Botvinnik felt Black would have been equal any way after 10. Bb2 a4 11. b4 d×c4

12. B×c4 Na7 and ... Bb5. Later experience indicates White has an edge after 13. 0–0 or 13. Ne5.

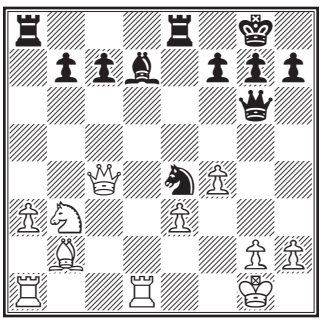
10. ... a4! 11. Nd2 Re8 12. 0–0 e5 13. d×e5

Botvinnik faulted White for failing to play 11. b4 and for opening the position now. But even after 13. Bb2 e4! 14. Bc2 a×b3 15. Q×b3 Na5 16. Qb4 b6 Black has the upper hand because he would control the light squares.

13. ... N×e5 14. Bb2 a×b3 15. N×b3?

He called this the "decisive" error. After 15. Q×b3 Ba4 16. Qc3 d×c4 17. B×c4 N×c4 18. N×c4 or 16. ... N×d3 17. Q×d3 d×c4 18. Q×d8 White's inferiority is manageable.

15. ... Ne4! 16. Qc2 N×c4 17. B×c4 d×c4 18. Q×c4 Qg5!



After 20. Rfd1

The threats are 19. ... Bb5 and 19. ... Bh3. Black can meet 19. Rfc1 with 19. ... N×f2! 20. K×f2 Q×e3+ 21. Kf1 Re4, winning.

19. f4 Qg6 20. Rfd1 *(diagram)*

Botvinnik was beginning to wield sarcasm in print. In the tournament book he wrote:

"How surprised I was when I read in the newspaper *64* Belavenets' comments on this position, where he claimed that after 20. Q×c7 Black wouldn't have anything decisive and proved his opinion by a whole string of variations! In reality, after 20. Q×c7 Bh3 21. Qc2 Rac8 22. Qe2 Nd6! (this 'difficult' move Belavenets missed) White can hardly survive." He gave supporting analysis. After Sergei Belavenets died in combat near Novgorod in 1942, Botvinnik omitted this slap from his notes.

20. ... Nd6 21. Qd3

And not 21. Q×c7 Bc6! 22. Rd2 Nc4!.

21. ... Bf5 22. Qc3 Be4 23. Rd2 Bc6 24. Qd3 Nf5 25. Be5 f6 26. B×c7 R×e3

Lev Abramov, born the same year as Botvinnik, was a rising star in Soviet chess organization. He recalled that the demand for tickets to this round was like that of a 1950s or '60s world championship match. The games were held at the Sports Committee building and huge crowds outside, on both banks of the Moika River, followed the denouement on giant demonstrations boards, grinding street traffic to a halt.

27. Qc4+ Kh8 28. Bb6 Ree8 29. Qf1! h5 30. Nd4 N×d4!

Black's edge would almost evaporate after the tempting 30. ... Ne3? because of 31. Qd3! Q×d3 32. R×d3 Nc4 33. N×c6. After the text, Botvinnik initially felt 31. R×d4 would have been "slightly better" because it discourages ... Re4. Later he said 31. R×d4 was risky because of 31. ... Qc2. Luděk Pachman preferred 31. ... Re3. They both overlooked the crushing 31. ... R×a3! (32. R×a3 Re1! 33. Q×e1 Q×g2 mate).

31. B×d4 Re4 32. Re1?

"The only move, otherwise Black would play ... Rae8, ... Qg4 and ... Re2 — the g2 square cannot be defended," Botvinnik wrote. But Khalifman denied that 32. Bc5 Rae8 is a decisive edge for Black.

32. ... R×e1 33. Q×e1 R×a3 34. Kh1 Ra8

"Both players were short of time, which explains some inaccuracies," Botvinnik wrote. Black could win with 34. ... Rf3!, intending ... R×f4. For example, 35. Be3 Qe4 36. Re2 R×e3!.

35. Re2 Kh7 36. h3 Re8 37. Qf2? Q×g2+! 38. Q×g2 R×e2 0–1

An editorial in the June issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR* said Botvinnik's "brilliant victory" in the 11th Championship shows "that in the face of the champion of the USSR the chess world has an undoubted challenger for the world championship." Voronkov calls it a "curious text" that seemed to call on Soviet officials to arrange a match with Alekhine — which, of course, was what they'd been trying to do for some time. The editorial was designed to prepare the public for opening contact with the "renegade" Alekhine.

The Botvinnik Method

In an introspective portion of the 11th Championship tournament book, Botvinnik said he used the event to test a new approach to competition. He and his wife had been thinking about how to maximize his energy and time — for chess and science. For instance, "In fall 1936 when I began work on my candidate dissertation 12 hours a day, Ganochka, fearing for my health, not without humor composed a 'Plan of study for the wisest boy in the world, M.M. Botvinnik."' This spelled out "when to sleep, when to eat, when to stroll, and even when to work!"

For the 11th Championship, his plan called for banning nervousness. "I personally have a head that works well only when I'm calm," he wrote. Calmness required clock comfort. He distinguished between "normal," manageable time pressure and extreme time pressure, which must be avoided. "I taught myself the economic expenditure of time," he said.

He also tried to upgrade his stamina. Soviet Championships often lasted 17 to 19 rounds and nearly a month. In the past he tired by "the 12 to 15th rounds and almost always lost games" then. He would reach the tournament's end "barely holding on in the saddle."

To correct that he adopted a strict regimen. "After breakfast I walked (one hour), then prepared for the game (about 25–30 minutes) after which I rested from chess. At 3:30, lunch, and then for about an hour I lay down. To lie down before a game is very useful. Afterwards you feel confident and the main thing is you aren't distracted by thoughts on outside issues."

The rounds of the 11th Championship ended at 10:30 in the evening. "I dined at 11

and went to sleep at 12." He admitted that in the past this wasn't always possible and he lost sleep sometimes by analyzing a just-finished game in his head until 3 A.M. "Now during competitions I never study chess before sleep. The error is not repeated."

The key was rigid scheduling. "Everything is done at the [given] time but strictly, without deviation," he said later. This included his daily physical exercises, the proper amount of sleep, "normal, rational diet" and "work, work and still more work."

Vladimir Kramnik put this in perspective: "I'd call him the first real professional, who understood that a result in chess depends not only on skillful playing. He was the first to think about the complex preparations for competition: not only openings but also sleep, regimen, physical readiness — in that he was certainly a pioneer. It's quite amusing for a modern player to read about the Alekhine–Euwe match. Games were postponed, one of them had a shot glass before play, the other had a business meeting before the very beginning of a game. Nothing of the kind could happen to Botvinnik."

In the book, Botvinnik didn't mention another feature of his regimen, his secret drink. He became famous after World War II for bringing a Thermos to rounds. What was in it? He later disclosed he tried lemonade and also black currant juice laced with lemon juice squeezed by Gayane. And, he added, "If I put on weight during a tournament it meant that I had played badly." The impression left by Botvinnik's article, which he reprinted in later works, was that he rigorously followed his regimen, always going to sleep soon after a game and never getting tired again late in a tournament. But some rules proved impossible to stick to.

Training with Slava

In July 1939 Botvinnik was living at the *dacha* of his father-in-law in the Leningrad suburb of Luga. Vladimir Snegiriev arrived unexpectedly. Snegiriev "had both an ugly face and an ugly exterior and dressed not so much poorly as slovenly," he wrote. But Botvinnik had found him to be "the greatest chess enthusiast and organizer I have ever had dealings with."

Snegiriev came to report that Alekhine had finally responded to their overture. He confirmed the Carlton Hotel agreement but objected to Botvinnik's exercising his option to hold the match in Moscow. Alekhine wanted the second half in London. Botvinnik responded with a "polite but firm letter" that insisted that all their games be played in Moscow.

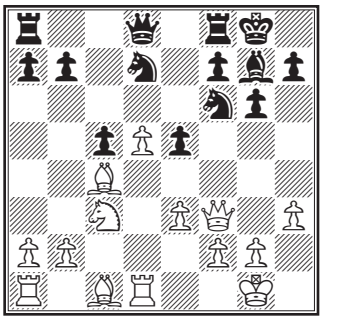
Even after World War II began on September 1, Botvinnik felt confident that the match would take place. Earlier that summer the Council of People's Commissars voted unanimously to award him a hefty 1,000 rubles. This was apparently at Snegiriev's urging, to prepare for the Alekhine match. Yet Botvinnik didn't actually play chess again until a 12-game match with Slava Ragozin in May 1940. (Ironically, this happened just as France was being overrun by the Wehrmacht, trapping Alekhine.) It was not a secret match like their October 1938 games but played on a stage. He scored four wins with White, one with Black and seven draws. Garry Kasparov has called Botvinnik "virtually the greatest match player in the entire history of chess." Yet the Ragozin match was the first he won — and he wouldn't win another until he was an ex–world champion.

Match, Leningrad 1940, third game
Botvinnik–Vyacheslav Ragozin
D94 Slav Defense

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. e3 g6 5. Nf3 Bg7 6. Bd3 0–0 7. 0–0 Bg4

"A dubious system of development," Botvinnik wrote in his first notes. But Black's setup remains popular today, with 9. ... e6.

8. h3 B×f3 9. Q×f3 d×c4? 10. B×c4 Nbd7 11. Rd1 e5 12. d5 c5? *(diagram)*



After 12. ... c5

Except for Black's last move this had been played before, in a Bogolyubov–I. Rabinovich game in which Black was worse after 12. ... Qc7 13. d×c6 b×c6. Bogolyubov, in his notes, said 12. ... c5 would be bad because White can play d5–d6 before Black can set up the ... Ne8–d6 blockade.

13. d6! Rb8 14. e4 Ne8 15. Be3 a6 16. a4 Rc8 17. Rd2 h6

Black wants to send his knight on an odyssey, ... Nef6–h7–g5–e6–d4!.

18. Rad1 Nef6 19. Nd5! N×d5 20. B×d5 Rb8 21. Qe2 Kh7 22. Rc2 Qf6?

Black was eager to get rid of the d6-pawn even at the expense of allowing White heavy pieces to dominate after 23. B×c5 N×c5 24. R×c5 Q×d6 25. Rdc1. Botvinnik was more ambitious.

23. Ba2 Rbc8 24. b4! c×b4 25. Rc7!

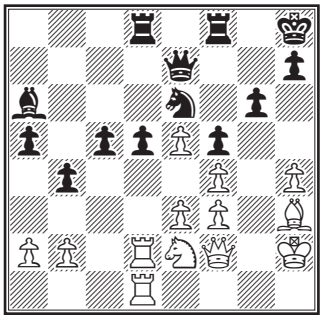
Now 25. ... Rcd8 26. R×b7 was resignable.

25. ... R×c7 26. d×c7 Nb6

And so was 27. ... Qc6 27. Rc1 or 27. Qc4.

27. B×b6 Q×b6 28. Qc4 Rc8 29. Rd7 Qc6 30. Q×c6!? b×c6 31. R×f7 c5 32. Be6 1–0

The closest Botvinnik came to losing was *(diagram)*:



Botvinnik–Ragozin, match, Leningrad 1940, ninth game
After 40. Rcd1

Botvinnik regarded a sealed move as a powerful weapon: It gave the sealer the ability to choose an unexpected move that he could study for hours at home while his opponent could only guess at the resumption position. But Ragozin's 40. ... d4!, the last move of the time control, virtually forced him to seal an obvious move. Play went:

41. e×d4 B×e2 42. R×e2 N×f4!?

Black had a fairly simple win with 42. ... R×d4 43. R×d4 c×d4. But it's easy to see why Black would be enticed by 42. ... N×f4 — and why White's reply is a kind of bluff.

43. d5!

"The only chance," wrote Levenfish, who said Black was still winning after 43. ... N×e2 44. Q×e2 Q×h4 despite the scary White pawns. For example, 45. e6 Qf4+ 46. Kg1 Rfe8 47. Bf1 c4! 48. Q×c4 Qe3+ 49. Kg2 R×e6!. Black thought, however, more than a half hour because he had overlooked 43. d5 in his home analysis. "It caused panic," Botvinnik said.

43. ... N×d5? 44. f4!

Suddenly White's bishop can play, and Red2 is coming up.

44. ... Nc7 45. Red2 R×d2 46. R×d2 Ne6 47. Bf1 Rd8! 48. Kg3 Kg7 49. Bc4 R×d2?

Botvinnik thought he was out of danger at move 44. But Alexander Khalifman said Black would still be solidly better after 49. ... Nd4 followed by ... h6 and ... g5.

50. Q×d2 Qd8 51. Qf2 Nd4 52. Qg2 Qd7 53. Qa8 a4?

A final blunder. Black should be equal after 53. ... Qc6.

54. Qg8+ Kh6 55. Qf8+ Kh5 56. Qf6 h6 57. e6

"At this point an amusing incident occurred," Botvinnik said in *Analytical.* Lev Abramov, the arbiter, had just arrived. He "came up onto the stage and took part in studying what had happened on the board, convinced that Black had gained an easy win." He was stunned to learn that Black resigned: 58. Q×d4 and 59. Be2 is mate.

Waiting for Alekhine

Despite the Carlton compact and his confirmation of it in July 1939, Alekhine was playing a double game. At the Buenos Aires team tournament in August 1939 Vladas Mikenas of the Lithuanian team asked him who would be his next match challenger. "Alekhine looked around and, having seen Keres, pointed at him and said that's him," Mikenas recalled.

But World War II broke out during that tournament, scrambling everyone's plans and remaking the political horizon. The May 1940 issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR* made clear where Soviet sympathies were. "Anglo-French imperialists, under the pretext of defending

Poland, started a war against Germany," it said. Things took another sharp turn in June when Soviet troops invaded the Baltic countries. Mikenas' independent Lithuania no longer existed. Neither did the Estonia of Paul Keres or the Latvia of Vladimir Petrov. Those three players were suddenly invited to the 12th Soviet Championship, beginning September 3 in Moscow.

It was the strongest in 20 years of Soviet Championships. Among those who failed to qualify were Vladimir Alatortsev, Ilya Kan, Vitaly Chekhover, Vsevolod Rauzer and Sergei Belavenets. The tournament was opened in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory with a declaration of the players' devotion to "our *vozhd*, friend and teacher, the great Stalin!:"

"Dear Iosif Vissarionovich!" it began. "From different cities, districts and republics of the mighty Soviet Union we came to Moscow to demonstrate the progress made in one area of Soviet culture — the chess art."

Botvinnik drew number 19 in the drawing of lots and that meant he began as Black against Igor Bondarevsky. This turned out to be a stunning loss. He had only an even score when he faced Petrov in the sixth round:

12th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1940
Botvinnik–Vladimir Petrov
C05 French Defense

1. e4

Botvinnik had an overall opening strategy in the tournament. Keep his first moves varied and surprising. He played 1. e4 four times, 1. d4 three times, 1. c4 and 1. Nf3 once each. He didn't use the same move in two White games in a row.

1. ... e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nd2

He adopts this move, apparently for the first time in a tournament game, because he didn't want to play against his own weapon (3. Nc3 Bb4).

3. ... Nf6 4. e5 Nfd7 5. Bd3 b6 6. Ne2 c5 7. c3 Ba6 8. B×a6 N×a6

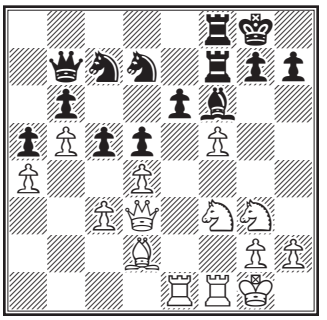
This trade was trendy in 1940. One of the Ragozin–Botvinnik training games went 9. 0–0 g6? 10. Nf3 Bg7 11. Bg5 Qc8 12. Qd2 h6 13. Be3 Qb7 14. Ne1? (14. b4!) and Botvinnik equalized after 14. ... Nab8! and ... Nbc6–e7.

9. 0–0 Be7 10. f4 f5 11. e×f6 B×f6

The new center gives White two plans, Ne5 and f4–f5.

12. Nf3 0–0 13. Be3 Nc7 14. Qd3 Qc8 15. Ng3 Qa6 16. Qd2 Rae8 17. a4! Qb7 18. b4! a5?

Black needs some open queenside lines, so 18. ... c×b4 19. c×b4 b5! and 20. a5 Na6 with play on the c-file was right, according to Salo Flohr.



After 23. f5

19. b5! Be7 20. Qd3 Rf7 21. Rae1 Ref8 22. Bd2 Bf6 23. f5! *(diagram)*

Now 23. ... Re7 would trim White's edge to a minimum (24. Bf4 e×f5 25. R×e7 B×e7 26. N×f5 Bd8).

23. ... Re8? 24. Bf4 c4 25. Qd2 Nf8 26. Ne5! B×e5?! 27. B×e5

Black should have tried to live with 26. ... Rfe7 27. Nc6. Now 27. ... e×f5 invites 28. N×f5 and 29. B×g7.

27. ... Qc8 28. Qg5 e×f5 29. N×f5 Ng6 30. B×c7! R×e1

Control of the e-file proves decisive, e.g. 30. ... R×c7 31. Nd6 R×e1 32. R×e1 Qd7 33. Q×d5+ Kh8 34. Qa8+.

31. R×e1 Q×c7 32. Re8+ Rf8 33. Ne7+! Kf7 34. N×d5 Qb7 35. Re3 Rb8 36. h4! Kf8 37. h5 1–0

Snegiriev was credited with introducing better demonstration boards for this championship. The board operators were 20 high-rated youngsters, including Vladimir Simagin and Yuri Averbakh. Averbakh, then 18, recalled later that when Botvinnik realized their strength he insisted that none of them come near 19-year-old Vasily Smyslov's table because he feared they would help him with moves.

Flohr, who was establishing himself as one of the Soviet Union's best chess journalists, felt Botvinnik or Keres would win the tournament. "It's impossible to assert with confidence that Botvinnik plays more strongly than Keres," he wrote in *64,* dated September 4, 1940. "But Botvinnik has much that others don't," he added, including "internal strength," "amazing endurance" and the skills of a "subtle psychologist." He keeps to the same regimen throughout. "During a tournament, theater and cinema don't exist. He must play chess."

Botvinnik seemed to be proving his superiority once again, as he led after ten rounds. But he eventually lost four games, more than he had in any tournament since 1927.

12th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1940
Vladimir Makogonov–Botvinnik
A93 Dutch Defense

1. d4 e6 2. c4 f5 3. g3 Nf6 4. Bg2 Be7 5. Nf3 d5 6. 0–0 0–0 7. b3 c6 8. Ne5 Nbd7 9. Nd3

This knight maneuver, in connection with Nd2–f3, is a good way to exploit the e5-hole. Makogonov's twist is 10. f3, with the idea of e2–e4.

9. ... Qe8 10. f3!? b6 11. Bb2 Bb7 12. Nd2

For example, if 12. ... Bd6, preparing ... e5, then 13. e4! f×e4 14. f×e4 favors White

(14. ... d×e4 15. N×e4 N×e4 16. R×f8+ Q×f8 17. B×e4). Botvinnik counters with a rare Dutch policy of ... c5 and ... d×c4 to target c4.

12. ... c5! 13. e3 Rc8 14. Qe2 d×c4!? 15. b×c4 Qf7 16. Ne5 Qe8 17. f4? B×g2 18. Q×g2 c×d4 19. e×d4

Now 19. ... N×e5! favors Black, e.g. 20. d×e5 Bc5+ 21. Kh1 Ng4 or 20. f×e5 Ng4 21. Qe2 Qa4! and ... Bb4 or ... Bg5. Botvinnik prefers to exploit the c4-pawn.

19. ... Bb4 20. Nef3 Nb8! 21. a3 B×d2 22. N×d2 b5! 23. Rac1 b×c4 24. N×c4 Qd7 25. Rfe1 Rfe8

Khalifman notes that 25. ... Nc6! would secure an edge (26. Ne5 N×e5 27. f×e5 Nd5 or 27. d×e5 Ne4). Botvinnik may have overlooked or underestimated the coming pawn sacrifice, which opens the bishop's diagonal.

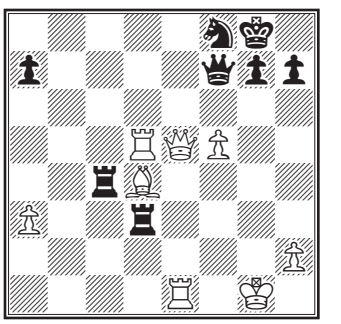
26. Ne3 Nc6 27. d5! N×d5 28. Nc4 Rb8 29. Rc2 Rb3 30. Rd2 Reb8 31. Qe2 Nd8 32. Qe5 R8b5 33. g4!

Vasily Panov recalled Makogonov as "a thick-set, stout, sober-minded man with an unhurried method of approach." Botvinnik felt that Makogonov's style was closest to Akiba Rubinstein's. Here he demonstrates unusual vigor, e.g. 33. ... f×g4 34. f5! with equal chances.

Makogonov's academic career prevented him from exploring his chess ability and he made his greatest mark as a second and trainer. He helped Smyslov in the 1948 world championship match-tournament and in his three title matches. When 10-year-old Garry Kasparov took part in Botvinnik's school, Botvinnik advised him to find "an experienced trainer" to study with — Makogonov.

33. ... Rc5 34. g×f5! R×c4 35. f×e6 N×e6 36. R×d5 Qf7 37. f5 Nf8 38. Bd4 Rd3? *(diagram)*

In later years Botvinnik would formulate another of his rules: Always leave yourself with five minutes for your 40th move. That was his way of avoiding the time trouble blunders that still plagued him in 1940. With 38. ... R×a3 White would have only a tiny edge.



After 38. ... Rd3

39. Rd8! Rd2

Or 39. ... Rc2 40. Qe6! and 40. ... Rdd2 41. Rb1! Rg2+ 42. Kf1 wins.

40. R×f8+! Q×f8

White mates after 40. ... K×f8 41. Qb8+ or 40. ... Q×f8 41. Qd5+ Qf7 42. Re8.

41. Qd5+ Kh8 42. Q×c4 Qd8 43. f6! R×d4 44. f7! 1–0

Despite his professed upgrade in stamina, Botvinnik stumbled when the tournament entered its third week: He lost in 73 moves to Mikenas, drew in 65 moves with the undis-

tinguished Eduard Gerstenfeld the next day, then was crushed by Lilienthal. He finished in a tie for fifth place. First place was shared by Lilienthal and Bondarevsky.

"Gone are the days when the all-union championship was the monopoly of one grandmaster," Bondarevsky said in *64,* on October 5 in an obvious slap at Botvinnik — who came to regard Bondarevsky as one of his worst enemies.

Once again Botvinnik's world championship aspirations were threatened. He didn't say much about the tournament until he wrote *Achieving the Aim* nearly 40 years later. Then he complained of the tough schedule, the few free days and the noise level. He even got a jab in at Sergei Prokofiev. "It was said that after every Keres victory S.S. Prokofiev vigorously applauded," he wrote. The composer defended himself saying "I have the right to express my feelings." But Botvinnik wondered how Prokofiev would feel if he were playing the violin in a trio, and applause for the pianist drowned out his performance.

The First Botvinnik School

In the mid–1930s the Leningrad Polytechnic obtained a house in a public park where chessplaying academics could gather. They asked their famous graduate to conduct classes. "Rather quickly I understood that I would receive no satisfaction from this," Botvinnik wrote. "My 'students' were adult players and not highly qualified ones." But he was convinced to conduct classes at another location, the House of Scientists on the Neva River embankment. "The house was very comfortable and as far as I recall the classes were conducted in the 'Don Quijote room' (there stood a metal sculpture of Cervantes' hero). This time the audience was more highly qualified players but they were still adults."

Meanwhile, the city authorities decided that the famed Anichkov Palace should be a Pioneer Palace, that is, a center for the Young Pioneers, a Scouting-like organization with a Marxist twist. Beginning in 1940 and continuing until the Nazi invasion, Botvinnik gave classes on Sundays for talented students in a Palace chess club that met in the former study of Tsar Alexander III and in a next-door room. He gave them assignments that required them to analyze a position and defend the analysis on a large demonstration board when they got together.

The way that one of his students, 14-year-old Mark Taimanov, arrived in the class was unique: "In 1937 a film group came, out of the blue, to the school where I studied," he recalled. The group, called Belarusfilm, was planning to make a movie, "Beethoven Concert." In it Vladimir Gardin, a celebrated actor and director, would play the part of the father of a violin prodigy who performed in a national competition of young musicians. The moviemakers were looking for a young musician who could play the role of the prodigy.

Taimanov was a pianist, not a violinist, but won the assignment. "I specially studied to play the violin, about half a year. Not only to play but to hold it right," he said. As a reward he was allowed to frequent the new Pioneer Palace ("I discovered an oasis of quiet"). He was there when Botvinnik began his chess classes, with eight to ten students.

"He considered his task was to teach us to teach ourselves," Taimanov recalled. "He

never gave a single lecture. He gave assignments. Let's say, here's an opening variation after 12 to 15 moves. The assignment: Give an analysis of positions that arise. For this he gave two weeks of independent work. It could also be endgame positions. I remember rook and bishop against rook," Taimanov said. "Now and then, he gave a simul with clocks with his students. Once I beat him, I recall, in a French Defense and I was very touched when I saw this game published in *64* with comments of Botvinnik. Botvinnik taught me the main thing. Never stop learning."

Absolution

"Many 'buried' me" after the 12th Championship, Botvinnik wrote. The future of Soviet chess seemed to lie with other players. But he quickly got a chance to recover. Too quickly, it might seem.

He did not explain, in *Analytical* and *Half a Century of Chess,* how his next tournament came about. He just said "it was decided" to stage a match-tournament for the title of "Absolute" champion of the USSR. But in *Achieving the Aim,* he gave a hint of what transpired.

Bondarevsky and Lilienthal were supposed to break the 12th Championship tie by playing a match, as had been done with two previous championship ties. But in December 1940 Botvinnik sent a letter to Vladimir Snegiriev "where I was ironic" about a playoff involving two players with no great previous results, while Keres and Botvinnik, who "already had such great achievements in international chess," were excluded. Snegiriev "understood my hint." Working quietly and quickly, he won approval from higher authorities to replace the match with a six-player "Absolute" championship, he said.

But it's unlikely that the tournament came about this way. Snegiriev's boss at Sports Committee, V.V. Snegov, would not have approved the tournament, according to historian Voronkov. The evidence indicates that the 1941 Championship, the only "Absolute" ever played, was Botvinnik's idea from the beginning. But he didn't want to be blamed for canceling the Bondarevsky–Lilienthal match. (That part didn't work: Bondarevsky despised Botvinnik for the rest of his life.)

If Botvinnik went above Sports Committee's head, whom did he contact? Yuri Averbakh said that at the time there were reports that Andrei Zhdanov made the final decision. The Leningrad party boss was then the final authority in Soviet culture matters. But Voronkov said Vyacheslav Molotov is more likely the one who ultimately approved the Absolute because he knew about the secret negotiations with Alekhine and wanted to protect Botvinnik. When Botvinnik's nephew Igor was asked about the Absolute in 1995 he answered obliquely: "Yes, Botvinnik sent letters to Molotov and to the Central Committee when he considered it to be in the interests of chess."

Once again Botvinnik had a big clock edge on his opponents; *64* announced the match-tournament on February 19, 1941, and said it would begin less than five weeks later, on March 23. This was strange because Soviet championships were usually announced several months in advance. Voronkov believes the short notice was done so that no one but Botvinnik could come to the board well prepared.

Botvinnik was already analyzing openings for his Absolute opponents in December 1940. But while he was getting into shape with the help of Ragozin — at a rest home in Pushkin that belonged to the Leningrad Communist Party committee — Lilienthal was off on a simultaneous exhibition tour of Siberia. "Suddenly I received a telegram from the head of Sports Committee Snegov to immediately return to Moscow to take part in a so-called absolute championship," he recalled. "This news was like an axe blow to my head. I was very angry. I simply didn't expect such a tournament. I was not prepared for such competition. Years later Bondarevsky told Keres, 'I was inexperienced. We should have refused!"'

As for Keres, he wrote, "I decided to take part in the match-tournament although I was busy with studies at Tartu University and didn't study chess for more than half a year." Much has been speculated about pressure being exerted later on Keres to secure the world championship for Botvinnik. But a more plausible case can be made that Keres was the victim of his own innocence. He didn't appreciate what was at stake in the Absolute or know about Botvinnik's secret dealings with Alekhine. In January 1941 he said, in *Shakhmaty v SSSR,* that Alekhine's next match opponent would be chosen based on "one or more tournaments in which all the challengers participate." He mentioned Capablanca, Euwe, Fine, Reshevsky, Flohr, Botvinnik and himself. He innocently added, "Based on a conversation with Alekhine I got the impression he agreed in principle with this plan." In other words, Keres hadn't a clue.

Preparation Payoff

When the Absolute began in Leningrad's Tauride Palace, Botvinnik's preparation paid off quickly. He got opening advantages on the White side of a French Defense against Boleslavsky and a King's Indian against Lilienthal and won his first two games. Then came the most lopsided game he ever played with Keres. When Averbakh was later asked about allegations that Keres was forced to lose to Botvinnik in 1948, he replied "You know, there was a certain mental weakness in Keres, a definite mental weakness. If you see, for example, Keres' game with Botvinnik in the Absolute Championship of 1941, you could see that Keres was a very poor psychologist. And Botvinnik was very strong in such things."

Absolute Soviet Championship, Leningrad 1941
Paul Keres–Botvinnik
E35 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. Qc2 d5 5. c×d5 e×d5 6. Bg5 h6 7. Bh4 c5

"Theory recommends 7. ... Be6," Belavenets and Konstantinopolsky wrote in a review of the 12th Championship openings. They added that after 7. ... c5 8. 0–0–0, "it is not easy for Black to find a fully sufficient continuation" since 8. ... c×d4 allows 9. N×d5! and 8. ... 0–0 9. d×c5 Be6 10. e4 or 9. ... B×c3 10. Q×c3 g5 11. Bg3 Ne4 12. Qa3 and 13. f3 favors White.

8. 0–0–0?

Apparently no one in Moscow was aware that Miguel Najdorf had shown in 1939 that 8. d×c5! was quite playable. It would be adopted later by Botvinnik's protégé, Garry Kasparov. Instead, Keres followed a Mikenas–Botvinnik game from the 12th Championship.

8. ... B×c3!

This unprovoked move exploits the c-file. Black has good play after 9. B×f6 Q×f6 10. Q×c3 Nc6. Botvinnik said he discovered the move during "November–December 1940," perhaps testing it at his Pioneer Palace school. It was independently found by Vladimir Simagin, who used it in a game against Belavenets that was printed in the January 1941 issue of *64*.

9. Q×c3 g5! 10. Bg3 c×d4!

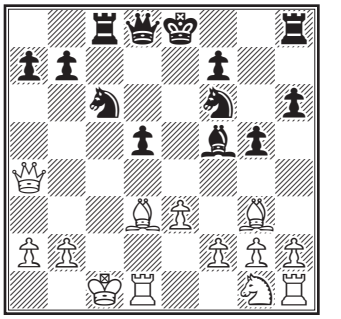
Botvinnik said it was this move, not 11. ... Ne4 as played by Simagin, which surprised Keres. Lev Polugaevsky, who became a devoted Botvinnik fan, felt that Keres was so depressed by this game that it virtually knocked him out of the tournament. This inspired Polugaevsky to become the world's premier expert at preparing openings.

11. Q×d4 Nc6 12. Qa4 Bf5 13. e3

"Unfortunately, at decisive moments of the struggle, Keres did not display the proper character and the required psychological stability," Botvinnik wrote. He felt the game would be over if he could safely occupy the c-file with a rook and that White needed to complicate with 13. f3, e.g. 13. ... Qb6 14. e4!? d×e4 15. Kb1.

13. ... Rc8 14. Bd3? *(diagram)*

But this is what really decides the game. Black is not yet winning after 14. Ne2 a6 15. Nc3 b5 and then 16. Q×a6 b4 17. e4! B×e4 18. Bb5 (Khalifman). Kasparov preferred 15. Qa3 b5 16. Kd2 a5 17. Rc1 Ne4+ 18. Kd1 although it's hard to be optimistic about White's chances then.



After 14. Bd3

14. ... Qd7! 15. Kb1 B×d3+ 16. R×d3 Qf5! 17. e4 N×e4 18. Ka1 0–0

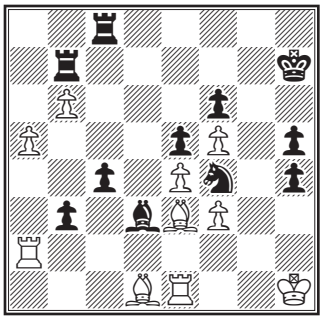
There was no reason for 18. ... N×g3? 19. R×g3 Q×f2 20. Nf3.

19. Rd1 b5! 20. Q×b5 Nd4! 21. Qd3 Nc2+ 22. Kb1 Nb4! 0–1

It's mate after 23. Qe3 Nd2+ 24. Ka1 Nc2. "I was always underestimated as a master of attack," Botvinnik wrote. He recalled how he was leaving the stage to get some fresh air when he ran into Snegiriev. The chess section chief could only say "Em, Em!"—his initials—"You yourself don't know what you have done." Botvinnik said he "was apparently delighted that his prediction about Botvinnik winning the tournament was working." The Absolute was another long tournament, of five weeks, and was plagued by illness, real and imagined.

"Only Bondarevsky and Smyslov resisted the temptation to get sick ... after a loss!" Botvinnik wrote. "Of course, our illnesses only accidentally coincided with losses."

Botvinnik's tournament lead remained a point or a point and a half until the 15th round when he won a dramatic game from Smyslov *(diagram)*.



Smyslov–Botvinnik, Absolute Championship, Moscow 1941
After 49. ... b3

With 50. Rb2 White can draw with his passed pawns (50. ... c3 51. R×b3 c2 52. B×c2 B×c2 53. Ra3). But Smyslov tried to win:

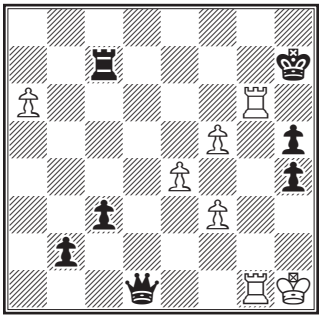
50. Ra3? b2 51. Ba4 c3!

He may have overlooked this and calculated only 51. ... b1(Q) 52. R×b1 B×b1 53. a6!, which is unclear.

52. Rb3 Ne2 53. Bb5 B×b5 54. R×b5 Nd4 55. B×d4 e×d4 56. a6

Or White may have misjudged this position, which seems to favor him after 56. ... Rbb8 57. b7 c2 58. b×c8(Q) R×c8 59. R×b2 — and certainly would favor him following 56. ... c2? 57. R×b2 c1(Q) 58. R×c1 R×c1+ 59. Kh2.

56. ... R×b6! 57. R×b6 d3!



After 60. ... d1(Q)

Smyslov studied this position for more than 50 minutes and came up with two inspired traps.

58. Rg1! d2 59. R×f6 Rc7

One trap was 59. ... c2? 60. Rf7+ Kh8 61. Rf6 with a draw (61. ... Kh7 62. Rf7+), since 61. ... Rc7? loses to 62. Rh6+ Rh7 63. a7!.

60. Rfg6 d1(Q)! 0–1 *(diagram)*

The other trap was 60. ... c2? 61. R6g5! Rc6 62. Rg7+ Kh6 63. Rg8!. But in the diagram 61. R×d1 loses to 61. ... c2.

A quiet 20-move draw with Keres in round 18 clinched first place. In the end Botvinnik won each of his mini-matches, beating Keres, Lilienthal and Bondarevsky by 2½–1½ and Smyslov and Boleslavsky by 3–1.

His Soviet supremacy would never be in doubt again. But chess would suddenly hold a low priority in his life less than eight weeks later.

8. War

Samuil Vainshtein had a hobby. He listened to German radio and was able to make a stunning prediction: War will break out on June 22, 1941, with the Nazi invasion of the USSR, he said. He was exactly right, Botvinnik recalled in one of his last articles. In it he praised Stalin, the "*Vozhd*," for getting his nation ready for war.

The verdict of history is that the Soviet Union was badly, if not criminally, *unprepared.* However, at the time it was a crime to say anything like this. One of the charges that would send Vladimir Petrov, one of Botvinnik's 1940 opponents, to a fatal Gulag sentence in 1942 was that he was overheard — apparently by other chess masters — saying that the Soviet Union was not ready to fight.

Botvinnik, who was obsessive about proper chess preparation, only hinted at the Soviet unpreparedness when he praised the "great leader's" skill in defense. "The 'style' of Stalin was like the style of those chess masters who get into a difficult position and then play with great strength." Botvinnik didn't write this for his own protection in 1941. He wrote it in 1995.

However, he had to recognize the obvious: "The first days of the war were a catastrophe," he wrote. The personal cost was great. His brother Isya, drafted in August, was in the town of Petroslavyanka on September 17 when he fell asleep at a refuge. He didn't hear warnings of incoming bombs and was fatally wounded from debris of a collapsing wall. He was buried in the bomb's crater. Also killed in the early days of the fighting was a Botvinnik aunt and uncle, as well as Vladimir Snegiriev, who died in the "home guard." Another major loss to Botvinnik was Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky, who perished on September 3, 1941, while trying to escape Leningrad via Lake Ladoga to the east.

Yet there were survivors. Botvinnik's 17-year-old cousin Yulii was wounded four times on the Ukrainian front and ended the war as a senior lieutenant commanding a battery. He later became the first postwar chess champion of Lvov. His photograph adorned a Lvov chess club along with that of his famous cousin.

By August, Leningrad was surrounded on three sides and under intense aerial bombardment. Viktor Korchnoi, whose father left for the front early in the war and never returned, lived with his mother at Liteiny, 16. The headquarters of the secret police (then called the NKVD) was a favorite target of 200-kilogram Nazi bombs and was located on

Liteiny, dangerously close to him. "One of the bombs landed on our house. Luckily it didn't explode," he recalled.

Botvinnik said he went to an enlistment office in Leningrad but got a "white ticket" (disqualification) because of his weak eyesight. His request to be sent to the front as a volunteer was refused. Since the Polytechnic was on summer vacation, he "helped a comrade to construct an electric air-filter for bomb shelters." While he listened to uplifting radio speeches by the ever-optimistic Stalin, a way out of Leningrad opened: Gayane and other members of the Kirov ballet company were allowed to evacuate to Molotov, the former city of Perm, more than 900 miles away in the Urals. Her family could come with her. "Let's go together. You can work as an engineer in the defense industry," she told Botvinnik. He asked the Leningrad Regional Party Committee what to do. "Comrade Botvinnik, there will come a time when you will once again be useful to the Soviet people as a chessplayer. Leave," he was told, according to *Achieving the Aim.*

Evacuating meant traveling light. Botvinnik had to give up the Emka car he was awarded in 1935. Each member of his family was allowed to take 50 kilograms of personal effects when they boarded at the Moskovsky train station. They got out on August 19, two days before the rail line was severed by the Nazis. At the town of Mga, they heard a distant explosion "and we were stationary for a long time" before the train moved on. They arrived in Molotov several days later, while Mga fell on August 30.

Their flight may have saved their lives. Among Botvinnik's opponents who died in Leningrad during the ensuing siege or elsewhere were Vsevolod Rauzer, Nikolai Riumin and Ilya and Abram Rabinovich. One of the biggest losses was his longtime supporter Samuil Vainshtein: Botvinnik had proposed leaving Leningrad together on the August 19 train. "No, I'm staying," he said, and died in January 1942.

Life in Molotov

Botvinnik, Gayane, his ailing mother and a nanny found quarters in a one-room dormitory at the Teachers Training Institute Hall of Residence in Molotov. Their family grew on April 26, 1942, when their daughter Olga, called Olya, was born. Botvinnik found work at a high-voltage factory and was eventually named its head, at the North-west Regional Network for the Ural Energy Organization.

Botvinnik apparently had no contact with chess until the winter of 1941-42 when he traveled "on business" nearly 200 miles to Sverdlovsk, the city where Tsar Nikolai II and his family were murdered in 1918. To his surprise he found a master tournament, directed by Yakov Rokhlin and being won by a nearly starving Lieutenant Vyacheslav Ragozin. There were few spectators but all the tickets had been sold, because with a ticket came a valuable roll of bread. In hard times bread became a "hard currency" and the Botvinniks traded their rations for potatoes to survive. But he also had to sell his Underwood typewriter. He had bought it with his brilliancy prize money for beating Savielly Tartakower at Nottingham and used it to type his doctoral thesis.

At this nadir of his life Botvinnik turned to chess analysis. His subject was the

Absolute. He worked on a tournament book in the evenings, finding where the games were really won and lost. The manuscript took a year and a half to write and was left in a suitcase until 1947. Botvinnik also formed what he called a "committee" to deal with the never-forgotten Alekhine match. He enlisted Ragozin, Rokhlin and his boyhood friend Grisha Goldberg, then a captain in the navy. Alekhine, trapped in occupied France, may also have been thinking about the match. His March 1941 articles, "Aryan and Jewish Chess," in the *Pariser Zeitung* attacked what he called the defense-mindedness of Emanuel Lasker, Akiba Rubinstein and other Jews. Botvinnik noticed that Alekhine did not mention the strongest Jewish player of the day. On the 50th anniversary of the notorious articles, Botvinnik wrote that Alekhine omitted him because he didn't want "to offend a future world championship match opponent."

After the turning-point battle of Stalingrad ended on February 2, 1943, "no one doubted our ultimate victory," Botvinnik wrote. But his life became harder. Although running a factory, he was assigned to cut timber for firewood. "One day in the forest knocked me up for a long time," he wrote in *Achieving the Aim.* "I thought it over and sent a letter to Molotov," who had guaranteed support for a match with Alekhine four years before.

"A couple of weeks later" Botvinnik was called to the office of an energy official, he said. The reason was to take a phone call from Moscow: Molotov had given instructions to Dmitry Zhimerin, People's Commissar of Soviet Power Plants, saying that it was "absolutely necessary to maintain Comrade Botvinnik's readiness to play chess." This is how the head of Soviet electricity supply became Botvinnik's new patron. Zhimerin's order allotted him three days a week for study. By the time the order reached the local level, the three days were interpreted to include Sunday, normally a free day. So only Wednesdays and Saturdays were added. "But I didn't argue; it was fine as it was!" Botvinnik wrote.

Soviet chess struggled on elsewhere. Master tournaments were held during the first two war years. But "I had no time to play and was not in the right frame of mind for it," he said. However, he was told by Sports Committee to go to Sverdlovsk in April 1943 for a double-round tournament of eight players. This was a treat because he was taken by a "coach driver" on a sledge to a state farm to rest and prepare. "The food at the farm was superb. Roast pork and potatoes twice a day and a liter of milk fresh from the cow as well as bread! I ate, walked, slept and worked with a fierce energy!" There were hints of this in his play at Sverdlovsk.

Sverdlovsk 1943
Botvinnik–Evgeny Zagoryansky
A13 English Opening

1. Nf3 d5 2. c4 e6 3. b3 Nf6 4. Bb2 Be7 5. e3 0–0 6. Nc3 c5

This eyes ... d4 and is much more active than the ... c6 setup used by Vitaly Chekhover at Moscow 1935.

7. c×d5 N×d5 8. N×d5 e×d5 9. d4 c×d4?

After 9. ... Qa5+! 10. Nd2? Bf6! Black is better, so White would have to go into an even endgame, 10. Qd2 Q×d2+ 11. K×d2 b6 or 11. N×d2 Bf6!.

10. Q×d4!? Bf6 11. Qd2 Nc6 12. Be2 Be6

But now 12. ... B×b2 13. Q×b2 Qa5+ 14. Qd2 Q×d2+ 15. K×d2 distinctly favors White because of the isolated d-pawn and a quick Rac1.

13. 0–0 B×b2 14. Q×b2 Qa5 15. Rfd1 Rad8?

Black needed counterplay from ... Rac8–c7 and ... Rfc8.

16. Rd2 Rd7 17. Rad1 Rfd8 18. h3 h6 19. Ne5! N×e5 20. Q×e5 Qc5 21. Bf3 b6 22. Qb2 Rc8 23. Qe5 Rcd8 24. Rd4 a5 25. g4!!

This game is a splendid example of the principle of creating a second weakness. With g4–g5 White will take aim at g7 and h8. Black's pieces, committed to the defense of the d-pawn, are stretched to the limit.

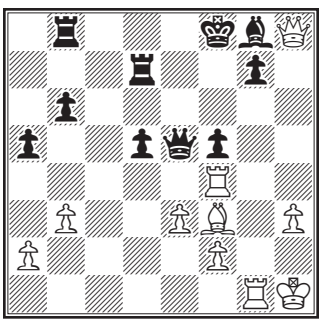
25. ... Qc6 26. g5 h×g5 27. Q×g5 f6

Black anticipates Qh5 and Rh4 and would meet 28. Qh5 with 28. ... g6! (29. Q×g6+?? Rg7) to defend the kingside and also attack (29. Qh6 Rh7).

28. Qg6! Bf7?! 29. Qg3 f5?

It's understandable that Black didn't trust 28. ... B×h3!? 29. Rh4 Be6 30. Rh7 Rc7!. But his 29th moves makes g7 much more vulnerable.

30. Qg5 Qe6 31. Kh1 Qe5 32. Rg1! Rf8 33. Qh6!



After 36. Rf4

Black should have stopped this move with ... Rd6. Now it's too late (33. ... Rd6 34. R×g7+!). But there were defensive chances after 33. ... Rc8 34. Rh4 Kf8 35. Q×b6 Rc2 or 33. ... g6 34. R×g6+ B×g6 35. Q×g6+ Rg7.

33. ... Rb8? 34. Rh4 Kf8 35. Qh8+ Bg8 36. Rf4! *(diagram)*

The f-pawn will fall after Rg5 and Qh5.

36. ... Rbb7 37. Rg5 Rf7 38. Qh5 Qa1+ 39. Kg2 g6 40. Q×g6 Bh7 41. Qd6+ Rfe7 42. Qd8+ 1–0

In view of 42. ... Re8 43. Rf×f5+ or 42. ... Kf7 43. B×d5+ Kf6 44. Qd6+.

At Sverdlovsk Botvinnik managed to score one win and one draw against each of his seven opponents and finished a point and a half ahead of the field. But his openings were suspect. He had spent two weeks trying to "clean up" a super-sharp line of the Open Defense of the Ruy Lopez, he said. But when he tried it at Sverdlovsk, Isaak Boleslavsky poked a huge hole in his home analysis. "Yes, my analyses needed to be checked with Ragozin, this was clear!" he wrote in *Analytical.* But that would have to wait until the end of the war. He was more successful with simpler lines:

Sverdlovsk 1943
Botvinnik–Vasily Smyslov
C46 Three Knights Game

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 Bb4

This appears to be a first — and last — for Smyslov, who preferred 3. ... Nf6 and 3. ... g6 in later games.

4. Nd5 Be7 5. d4 d6 6. Bb5 Bg4?! 7. d×e5! d×e5 8. h3 Bd7 9. Qe2! Nf6 10. Bg5 0–0

Botvinnik felt the inferior endgame of 10. ... N×d5 11. e×d5 B×g5 12. d×c6 b×c6 13. Q×e5+ Qe7 was preferable to what happens to Black now.

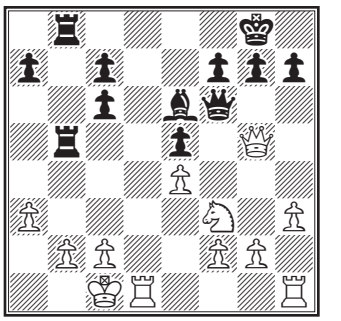
11. B×f6! B×f6 12. 0–0–0

This is enterprising play that threatens 13. N×f6+ Q×f6? 14. R×d7.

12. ... Be6! 13. B×c6 b×c6 14. N×f6+

Not 14. Nb6? Bg5+ 15. Kb1 a×b6! (16. R×d8 B×a2+ 17. Ka1 Bc4+).

14. ... Q×f6 15. Qe3! Rfb8 16. a3 Rb5 17. Qg5! Rab8 *(diagram)*



After 17. ... Rab8

Or 17. ... Q×g5+ 18. N×g5 Bc4 19. b3. White's control of the d-file and better pawns put him on the cusp of a winning position.

18. b3 h6 19. Q×f6 g×f6 20. Rd3 f5?

It's the other doubled pawn that should be liquidated (... c5–c4!).

21. e×f5 B×f5 22. Rc3 Bd7 23. Rd1 Be8 24. a4! Ra5 25. Nd2 Rd5 26. Ne4 R×d1+ 27. K×d1 Rd8+ 28. Ke2 Kg7 29. Rg3+ Kf8 30. Nf6! Ke7!

This pawn sacrifice, to activate his king, was the best try. Black wanted to avoid the lost pawn endgame after 31. Rg8+ as well as the lost rook endgame of 30. ... Bd7 31. N×d7+! R×d7 32. Rc3 Rd6 33. Rc5 f6 34. Ra5.

31. Ng8+ Ke6 32. N×h6 f5 33. Rg7! Bd7 34. Rg6+ Kd5 35. g4! f4 36. Rg8! R×g8 37. N×g8 Kd4

Also lost is 37. ... Ke6 38. f3 Kf7 39. Nh6+ Kg6 40. Nf5.

38. Nf6 Bc8 39. f3 Kc3 40. h4 1–0

Chess news was sparse during the war. It's unclear when Botvinnik learned that a major tournament had taken place at Salzburg in June 1943 and that Alexander Alekhine had proposed to Paul Keres then that they play a world championship match. Had Keres accepted, his fate and Botvinnik's — as well as the status of the postwar championship and the future of FIDE — would have been quite different. But Keres said no.

Moscow

The war ground on. Combat claimed the lives of more of Botvinnik's opponents. Sergei Belavenets, with whom he had scored 2½–½, was killed in 1942. Vladislav Silich, who lost to him in a fine game in the semifinals of the 6th Soviet Championship, died in 1943. Mark Stolberg, a tall, thin, 18-year-old who wore horn-rimmed glasses when he lost to Botvinnik in the 1940 Soviet Championship, perished in May 1942.

But Moscow was safe. In the summer of 1943 Zhimerin, the electric power commissar, summoned Botvinnik there and suggested "I transfer to the capital. He turned out to be a fan of mine and our friendship dates from this time." This was another life-changing event for Botvinnik. Moscow was becoming the undoubted chess center of the USSR as Leningrad slowly recovered from the nearly three-year blockade. In the 14th Soviet Championship, Muscovites would take seven of the ten top places. In contrast, there were only six Muscovites — and eight Leningraders — in the prewar 11th Championship.

Having lost so many of his politically connected supporters during the Terror and the war, Botvinnik began to repair his network in Moscow. He telephoned Boris Podtserob, a first-category player who was briefly his college classmate. By 1943 Podtserob was a rising diplomat and head of the secretariat of the People's Commissarriat for Foreign Affairs and a top aide to the commissar, that is, Molotov.

Botvinnik needed new allies because he had a stunning new goal: He wanted to play a world championship match — with Samuel Reshevsky. Why? "Alekhine was then playing in tournaments in Occupied Europe. What if he were to shirk the match with me?" he wrote in *Achieving the Aim.* In Botvinnik's mind, Keres had lost whatever claim he had on the championship with his poor result in the Absolute. Reuben Fine, who tied with Keres at AVRO, had no claim because he wasn't the U.S. champion. And Capablanca had died in 1942. "So that meant that all that was left was to beat Reshevsky in a match."

How such a match could be held during the war — and how it could claim to be a championship while Alekhine was very much alive — was left unexplained by Botvinnik. After all, Alekhine's play in the wartime tournaments was still impressive. He had beaten Keres three times in 1942 alone. Moreover, the Alekhine of 1943 was considered no more of a political pariah to be ignored than the Alekhine of 1946, whom Botvinnik was delighted to face in a championship match.

Nevertheless, Podtserob steered him to the office of Maxim Litvinov, who had been dumped as chief of Soviet foreign affairs in 1939, yet had resurfaced as Soviet ambassador to Washington in 1943 and would be able to open contacts with the Americans. Botvinnik wrote how "amazed" he was that such a hero of the Revolution "greeted me in simple fashion as if I were an old acquaintance." But Litvinov told him that while he favored the match, "I myself cannot decide matters." Only then did Botvinnik realize there was no chance he would play Reshevsky.

Nevertheless, he decided to stay in shape by getting himself invited to the 23rd Moscow Championship beginning December 5, 1943. Only six of his 15 games were preserved. One of them, a victory over Viktor Lyublinsky, became a model for Exchange sacrifices.

Another was against Smyslov, who forgot about his clock, was saved from forfeiture by the audience and went on to win in 50 moves. The third game had historic value:

Moscow Championship 1943
A. Zhivtsov–Botvinnik
D44 Semi-Slav Defense

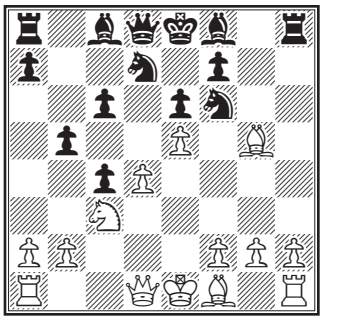
1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 c6

This move order avoids the popular 3. ... Nf6 4. Bg5, as well as the drawish 1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. c×d5. The drawback to it is 4. e4!?. Yet there is no record of Botvinnik facing that move. What we know is that in January 1951 he prepared for his upcoming match with David Bronstein by analyzing 4. e4 d×e4 5. N×e4 Bb4+ 6. Bd2 Q×d4 7. B×b4 Q×e4+ 8. Be2. He concluded Black must play 8. ... Q×g2 9. Bf3 Qg5. White either achieves no more than equality or reaches a "complicated game" with a defensible position for Black, he decided.

4. Nf3 Nf6 5. Bg5 d×c4!

Botvinnik said he had been prepared to play this in the Absolute but the only time he reached 4. ... Nf6, his opponent, Lilienthal, played 5. e3.

6. e4 b5 7. e5 h6 8. Bh4 g5 9. N×g5 h×g5 10. B×g5 Nbd7 *(diagram)*



After 10. ... Nbd7

Botvinnik said he had been analyzing this position since a Szabó–Euwe game from Hastings 1938-39. It wasn't until the 1945 "radio match" that his rivals began to realize its strength. His opponent, Arnold Denker, played 11. e×f6 Bb7 12. Be2 Qb6 13. 0–0 0–0–0 14. a4 b4! 15. Ne4 c5 16. Qb1 Qc7! 17. Ng3 c×d4 18. B×c4 Qc6! 19. f3 and was crushed by 19. ... d3! 20. Qc1 Bc5+ 21. Kh1 Qd6! 22. Qf4 R×h2+! 23. K×h2 Rh8+ 24. Qh4 R×h4+ 25. B×h4 Qf4 0–1, and the "Botvinnik Variation" became known to the world.

But in 1996, postal master Viktor Charushin claimed in *64* that Klaus Junge, the doomed, forgotten German, should get credit for the line. Junge, who was 21 when he died in one of the last battles of World War II, had played the variation at least as early as 1938 and there were five published games of his before Zhivtsov–Botvinnik. For example, Zollner–Junge, Warsaw 1942, went 11. Qf3 Bb7 12. Be2 Qb6 13. B×f6 c5 14. Ne4 Rg8 15. Qf4 c×d4 16. Bh5 Nc5! 17. B×f7+ Kd7! 18. N×c5+ B×c5 19. 0–0–0 Bd5 20. B×g8 R×g8 21. h4 c3 and Black won a stirring game.

Charushin said Botvinnik was preparing for Alekhine, must have studied the games of Alekhine's wartime opponents, like Junge, and had access to foreign chess literature. But he never mentioned Junge in his notes. "Botvinnik knew everything but kept quiet," Charushin said. Botvinnik's nephew Igor replied in *64* that his uncle never put his name on the variation. Others did. He also questioned whether "a 14-year-old (!) Junge" really played the variation as early as claimed and whether Botvinnik would have known of him.

Besides, he said, the Alekhine's Defense isn't credited to Mikhail Klyatskin although Klyatskin's prior claim to analyzing 1. e4 Nf6 had been proven. It wasn't the most convincing defense. But on occasion Mikhail Botvinnik downplayed authorship, referring to "the so-called Botvinnik Variation" and, in his private notes, even called it "The Variation (Whose?)."

11. Qf3 Bb7 12. e×f6 Qb6 13. Qe3

This odd-looking move is designed to meet 13. ... c5 with 14. d5!.

13. ... 0–0–0 14. 0–0–0 Qa5 15. Kb1 Nb6

Positions like this defy exact evaluation. Today computers conclude White is still doing well, after 16. Be2 and 16. ... b4 17. Ne4 Nd5, for instance. Botvinnik's rivals also doubted that Black stood well in such a double-edged opening. Using "normal positional concepts" they "considered this new system to be incorrect and happily headed for the proposed variations, like ... moths to a light!" Botvinnik wrote.

16. h4 b4 17. Ne4 c5! 18. f3 c3!

So that 19. b×c3 Nd5 and 20. ... N×c3+ said Botvinnik. But Alexander Khalifman felt 20. Qf2 N×c3+ 21. N×c3 b×c3 22. d5 was White's best.

19. Be2 Bd5 20. a3 Na4?

Botvinnik didn't mention 20. ... Bb3! but its threat of ... c2+ should win, e.g. 21. b×c3 Q×a3 or 21. Rc1 Nd5 22. Qf2 c×b2.

21. d×c5 B×c5! 22. N×c5 N×c5 23. b×c3

Botvinnik indicated that White had been lost for some time and said "resistance could have been slightly prolonged" by 23. Rc1! Nb3 24. Rc2 Nd4! 25. Rcc1 c2+ 26. R×c2+ N×c2 27. K×c2. But Khalifman considered that unclear and said the same about 23. ... Kb7 24. Rhd1 Nb3 25. Rc2 b×a3 26. b×a3 Rc8 27. R×d5! e×d5 28. Ka2.

23. ... b×c3 24. Rd3 Qb6+ 25. Kc1 Qb2+ 26. Kd1 N×d3 27. B×d3 Bb3+ 0–1

The outcome is obvious after 28. Ke1 Qd2+ 29. Q×d2 c×d2+ 30. K×d2 Bc4.

Face-off

During the championship Botvinnik was invited to dinner by Boris Vainshtein, who had become the new chess section chairman. Vainshtein later recalled how in 1941 he was "appointed deputy to the head of the chief directorate of construction of the People's Commissariat of Defense of the USSR." That is, he was an NKVD colonel in a key planning and construction department of the secret police.

The dinner "was superb by the standard of the time — cutlets and wine," Botvinnik recalled. But then Vainshtein began "demagogic arguments" against Alekhine, whom he said

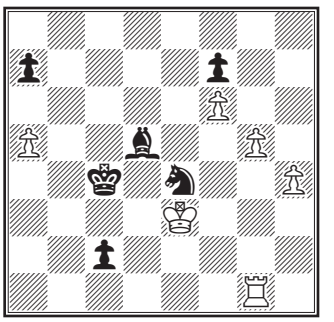
should be stripped of his championship title and barred from chess life. Botvinnik replied that all that mattered was that the Soviet government had supported a Botvinnik–Alekhine match in 1939. Alekhine's collaboration with the Nazis was immaterial. "I expressed my point of view calmly, sharply and firmly and then took my leave," he said.

"Vainshtein was a terrible person," he wrote later. "He hated me and he did not want me to become world champion." Vainshtein "used all his connections to try and hinder my discussions with Alekhine," despite "Stalin's decision" to arrange the match. After this blow-up, he said, his case "gradually gained the support of the other members" of the chess section. But he went above them and won support from the Party's Central Committee and the government department of Health Service to which Sports Committee was subordinate. He seemed to be finished with fighting Vainshtein.

Botvinnik's life brightened further in early 1944. He was transferred to the technical department of the Ministry of Electric Power Stations in Moscow, where Molotov "assigned me a separate flat." It turned out to be a two-room, high-ceilinged apartment on the fifth floor of a building on Prospect Mira in the heart of the city. Botvinnik's daughter later said it meant living "in luxury" because her friends were stuck in communal apartments or much worse. When she first saw the spacious flat she was surprised by how big it was. "What, another room!" she exclaimed. Botvinnik was able to retrieve his furniture from Leningrad. It was a miracle that it was intact, when so much wooden furniture had been burned for fuel. He also managed to get his wife transferred from the Kirov to the Bolshoi ballet company. Life was returning to normal, thanks to Botvinnik's allies, including Ragozin. His old sparring partner had become the adjutant to NKVD Lieutenant General Kuzma Sinilov, a first-category player who happened to be the military commandant of Moscow.

The 13th Soviet Championship began on May 21, 1944, in the October Hall of the House of Unions. Botvinnik was so proud of his play that he annotated five of his 11 victories in his second game collection and nine of them in *Analytical.* One that he left out was *(diagram)*:

Lilienthal–Botvinnik,
13th Soviet Championship,
Moscow 1944
After 51. Rg1



It appears that Black can't stop the kingside pawns. But it's the c-pawn that matters more, e.g., 51. ... Nc5 52. Kd2? Be4! and ... Nb3+ wins for Black.

The right answer to 51. ... Nc5? is 52. Rc1! and then 52. ... Be4 53. h5 Nb3 54. Re1 Bh7 55. g6! Bg8 56. h6! and wins. Another key point is 52. ... Kc3 can be met by 53. R×c2+! K×c2 54. Kd4, when White wins a piece and holds the upper hand.

51. ... Kc3! 52. Kf4

Lilienthal, whom Botvinnik fondly called "Andrusha" or "Lili," could have won a piece with 52. g6 f×g6 53. f7 B×f7 54. K×e4. But he would lose the game after 54. ... Kb2. Also doomed is 52. h5? N×g5 53. R×g5? c1(Q)+.

52. ... Nf2! 53. Ke5 Nd1 54. g6 c1(Q) 55. Rg3+ Kb4 56. K×d5 Qc5+ 57. Ke4 f×g6 0–1

No better was 53. Rc1 Nd3+. In the fourth round, Botvinnik lost to David Bronstein, another newcomer to Moscow. Bronstein had been working as a manager to rebuild the Red October metallurgic factory in Stalingrad in the fall of 1943 when Vainshtein brought him to the capital. When Bronstein was invited to the 13th Championship he had only his green overalls to wear. "And every day the chairman of Sports Committee Snegov threatened not to let me in for the next round in such an appearance. It wasn't proper in public," he recalled. "But I simply had no other clothes."

Smyslov won his first five games and held a point and a half lead over Botvinnik when they met in the eighth round. Botvinnik said the game "aroused perhaps even more interest" than his last-round game with Kotov five years before.

13th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1944
Vasily Smyslov–Botvinnik
C19 French Defense

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 B×c3+ 6. b×c3 Ne7

Botvinnik said he enjoyed, with "particular satisfaction," using 3. ... Bb4 against Smyslov because, like other classically-molded players, his opponent considered the Winawer Variation to be bad. But their career score in the line was three Botvinnik wins, three Smyslov wins and six draws.

Botvinnik's treatment of the variation would change. In a 1946 USSR–Great Britain match Hugh Alexander beat him after 7. Qg4 c×d4 8. Q×g7 Rg8 9. Q×h7 Qa5? 10. Rb1 Q×c3+ 11. Bd2 Qc7 12. f4 Nbc6 13. Nf3 and 14. Ng5!.

Botvinnik concluded that the Englishman had "refuted" 5. ... B×c3+, according to his secret analysis dated October 22, 1947, when he was training for the world championship match-tournament. "The only possibility for Black is the retreat of the bishop to a5," he wrote. He analyzed 5. ... Ba5 6. b4 c×d4 7. b×a5 d×c3 8. Qg4 Kf8 and 7. Nb5 Bc7 8. Qg4 B×e5 9. Nf3 h5 10. Qh3 Bf6 and concluded Black was better. But he didn't play 5. ... Ba5 in public until the first game of the 1954 world championship match.

7. a4 Nbc6 8. Nf3 Qa5 9. Bd2 c4 10. Ng5 h6 11. Nh3 Ng6 12. Qf3?

White tried to execute the knight maneuver to f4 and h5 that was recommended after Botvinnik's win from Pogrebyssky. But 11. ... Ng6 (12. Nf4 N×f4) discouraged him. Smyslov's move misplaces the queen. Afterwards both 12. Be2 followed by Bh5! and 12. g4 were recommended.

12. ... Bd7 13. Nf4 N×f4 14. Q×f4 Ne7! 15. h4 B×a4!

Reuben Fine, in *The World's a Chessboard,* called Botvinnik's innovations "profound opening combinations" and said they were the main reason for his postwar supremacy. Fine was particularly impressed by Botvinnik's seemingly daring captures of the a-pawn in the Winawer. But there is little risk here since Black can attack by means of ... Qb5, ... Rc8–c6–a6 and ... Qb2.

Botvinnik examines a position during the 1946 U.S.–USSR match in Moscow.

16. h5 Qb5 17. Kd1 Rc8 18. Bc1 Rc6! 19. Be2 Ra6 20. Kd2 0–0?! 21. g4!

Just when he appeared to be sailing to a pawn-ahead victory (20. ... Qb6 and 21. ... Bd7 or 20. ... Qd7 and 21. ... Bb5) Botvinnik gave his opponent a kingside target. He said he was setting a trap with 20. ... 0–0—21. Ba3 B×c2 22. B×e7 loses to 22. ... Qb2!. "But traps are good only in a hopeless position or when they do not worsen the position," he wrote. Now Smyslov tries to exploit 20. ... 0–0 with g4–g5.

21. ... f6! 22. e×f6 R×f6 23. Qc7 Rf7 24. Qd8+ Kh7 25. f4! Qa5

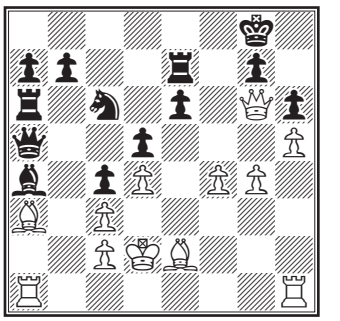
Botvinnik had thought more than 30 minutes and concluded that 25. ... Qd7 was best—but only equal. "At the last minute I nevertheless decided to take a chance and I chose a rather cunning variation but one extremely dangerous for Black."

26. Qb8 Nc6 27. Qe8 Re7 28. Qg6+

Smyslov played this move without thinking, based on a "serious delusion," Botvinnik wrote. He thought 28. Qf8 Qd8 29. Q×d8 N×d8 30. g5 was better. But the check is by no means an error.

28. ... Kg8 29. Ba3 *(diagram)*

White had been preparing g4–g5–g6+ or g×h6 for several moves. But now 29. g5, which Botvinnik considered "essential" to save his queen from being trapped, would invite



After 29. Ba3

29. ... N×d4 30. g×h6 N×e2 and wins. (On 30. R×a4 Q×a4 31. c×d4 e5 32. Qf5! Black can improve with the winning 31. ... Qb4+! since 32. Ke3 e5 is a forced win, according to Voronkov.) In the diagram Black's best is 29. ... Qc7! 30. Rhf1 Nb4! in view of 31. B×b4 Be8!, sealing the trap. White could maintain his chances with the stunning 31. B×c4!! and 31. ... B×c2 32. B×a6 B×g6 33. B×b4 (Khalifman). But Botvinnik couldn't resist playing one of his most famous moves.

29. ... e5!!? 30. f×e5?

Black would be winning after 30. B×e7 N×e7, which traps the queen. However, he is very much alive following 30. d×e5!. A key line runs 30. ... N×e5 31. Qf5 Rf6 32. Q×f6 g×f6 33. B×e7 d4! 34. Bb4 Qd5 35. f×e5 d×c3+ 36. Ke3 Q×e5+ 37. Kf2 Qd4+ 38. Kg3 B×c2 (Khalifman) when anything can happen. Smyslov's choice may have been prompted by seeing that 30. f×e5 N×e5 31. Q×a6! Q×a6 32. B×e7 favors him.

30. ... N×d4! 31. Bb4 Qd8

Now White gets less than sufficient compensation for the queen.

32. Q×a6 b×a6 33. c×d4 Rb7! 34. R×a4 Qg5+ 35. Kd1?

Better was 35. Kc3 Qe3+ 36. Bd3 c×d3 37. c×d3, when Black has technical difficulties working out the win.

35. ... a5! 36. Bf3 R×b4 37. B×d5+ Kf8 38. Rf1+ Ke8 39. Bc6+ Ke7 40. R×b4 Qg4+ 0–1

It was Botvinnik the psychologist who developed a theory that a single crushing defeat could inflict a long-term emotional wound on an opponent. Smyslov "was so demoralized" by the game that "afterwards he failed to put up any strong opposition to me," he wrote in his second game collection. (But Smyslov was no longer demoralized when he dethroned Botvinnik as world champion in 1957.)

The game above occurred during a 6–0 Botvinnik streak that put him in the lead. He stumbled in the last week of the tournament, losing to Alexander Tolush, who brashly used the Center Game. Nevertheless, Botvinnik finished with a score of 12½–3½, two points ahead of Smyslov. In a reversal of past practice, money prizes had been promised in the tournament program. "I came to the closing ceremony and I saw an old table clock under a glass case on the podium. Asking what it was I was told it was first prize," he wrote in *Achieving the Aim*. This outraged him, both because it showed a lack of respect for chess and because it broke the rules. "The program is the constitution of the event," he wrote. "What is written there must be carried out to the letter." His protest was respected: He finally got his prize money — six months later.

After Victory Day

Botvinnik often said that a player becomes less creative, more cautious and blunder-prone after age 30, and his calculation suffers in terms of speed and quality. But he also

said that the *best* time for a chessplayer was between 30 and 40. He just has to "develop positional understanding to compensate for the lowering of strength in calculating variations," as he put it. Botvinnik was about to turn 34 when he got a chance to prove he could compensate. This was in the 14th Soviet Championship, which began June 1. Germany had surrendered on May 9 — which is known to this day in Russia as Victory Day — and virtually all the top Soviet players were available. The chief exceptions were Paul Keres, who was under suspicion because he had lived in Nazi-occupied Estonia, and Igor Bondarevsky, whose activities during the war remain murky.

"Will Botvinnik still be Botvinnik?" read the headline in the June 6 tournament bulletin. It quoted a fan as saying, "Botvinnik has aged. He plays too carefully and can't withstand a sharp combinational battle." Botvinnik's answer was five wins and a draw in his first six games.

14th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1945
Boris Ratner–Botvinnik
D87 Grünfeld Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5 4. c×d5 N×d5 5. e4 N×c3 6. b×c3 c5 7. Bc4 Bg7 8. Ne2 0–0 9. 0–0 Nd7!?

Among the ideas of Black's last move is to harass the c4-bishop with ... Nb6 and to exert pressure on the c-file with ... Qc7. But in the 1951 world championship match Bronstein demonstrated the strength of 10. Bg5!, which would meet ... Qc7 with B×e7. And so 9. ... Nd7 disappeared.

10. a4?! Qc7 11. Ba2 b6! 12. Be3 Ba6 13. Re1

Black already has good center pressure, e.g. 13. Qd2 Rad8 14. Rfd1 Ne5!.

13. ... Rad8 14. Qb3 e5 15. d5 c4!

Black might have been tempted to play 15. ... Bd3 and then 16. ... c4, to get better use of his bishop. But White has 16. c4!, since 16. ... B×e4 17. Ng3 Bf5 18. N×f5 offers good compensation for a pawn.

16. Qa3 f5 17. Bg5

Khalifman questions this move because 17. ... Bf6 18. B×f6 N×f6 would doom White's center and 18. Bh6 gets the bishop stuck on h6 and ultimately costs him the game. Better was 17. e×f5 g×f5 18. d6 Qc6.

17. ... Bf6! 18. Bh6 Rf7 19. e×f5 g×f5 20. a5 b5 21. Rad1?

Botvinnik said it was "psychologically more correct" to complicate with 21. d6. Black is better then but far from winning after 21. ... Qc5 22. Bb1 Q×a3 23. R×a3 Nc5 24. B×f5 Bh4 25. g4.

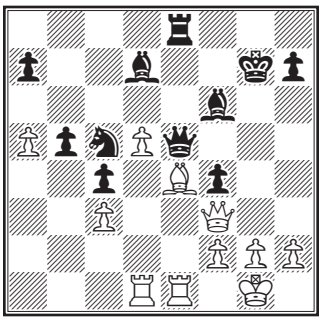
21. ... Nc5 22. Ng3 Be7! 23. Qc1 f4!

So that 24. Ne4 N×e4 25. R×e4 Rd6 traps the bishop.

24. Nh5 Qd6 25. Bg7 R×g7 26. N×g7 K×g7 27. Bb1 Bc8 28. Qc2 Rh8

Also winning was the simpler 28. ... Nd3 because of 29. R×d3 c×d3 30. Q×d3 Rh8 and then 31. Q×b5 Ba6.

29. Qe2 Bf6 30. Qh5 Bd7 31. Bc2 e4! 32. B×e4 Qe5



After 33. ... Re8

Since the endgame would be hopeless, White must accept a crushing queen sacrifice.

33. Qf3 Re8! *(diagram)* **34. Bd3 Q×e1+ 35. R×e1 R×e1+ 36. Bf1 Ne4! 37. Q×f4 N×c3 38. Qg3+ Kf7 0–1**

Soviet press reports of the July 4 prize ceremony claimed that 10,000 rubles were given to Botvinnik, 6,000 rubles to Isaak Boleslavsky for second prize and 4,000 to Bronstein for third, quite a change from the previous Championship — and a rare case in Soviet times when prize amounts were disclosed.

Botvinnik said he played the best chess of his career in three events — this tournament, the 1948 world championship match-tournament and the 1961 return match with Mikhail Tal. But his supremacy was clearest in 1945. The www.chessmetrics.com Web site calculated that the difference between Botvinnik's rating and the world's second strongest player at the time (Alekhine) was a staggering 122 points. That has been exceeded only by the 125-point gap Bobby Fischer achieved before his world championship match in 1972. Botvinnik credited his result to preparation, including putting "my nervous system completely in order." He joked in *Analytical* that his results were foretold when he and Ragozin went to a barbershop. "I ended up with some inexperienced girl, who made an unbelievable mess of my hair," he recalled. "Misha," said Ragozin, "You endured this so calmly that you are already guaranteed first place."

After conceding a draw with Kotov in round 15 he had virtually clinched first place with three games to go. He won all three. Among his victims was Grisha Goldberg. Demobilized from the military, Goldberg would spend the postwar years in a Moscow construction organization, running the chess program for the large *Trud* sports society and being Botvinnik's occasional second.

Exit Vainshtein

Botvinnik indicated in his memoirs that his battle with Boris Samoilovich Vainshtein — which began at dinner at Vainshtein's home — was wrapped up at a 1944 chess section conference. "The question was raised of retiring Vainshtein," he wrote in *Achieving the Aim.* Vainshtein "defended himself desperately" but realized his position was hopeless when Vasily Smyslov began his comment by referring to him as "the former chairman of

the section." Vainshtein "clasped his hands together and capitulated," according to Botvinnik. But there are other, perhaps more credible accounts.

Vainshtein held his tongue until six months before he died. He said the showdown actually occurred in July 1945, right after the 14th Championship, and it was attended by, among others, Alexander Kotov, Smyslov, Bronstein and Ragozin. The main issue on the agenda was not his future but the Alekhine–Botvinnik match, he said. The match was voted down. Even Ragozin opposed it, he said. But there was a second vote, and this time the issue was passed to a higher level to decide.

How much higher? Vainshtein said Stalin didn't concern himself in these matters and neither did Lavrentia Beria, the powerful minister of internal affairs. "But Molotov had enough authority to decide the question himself," Vainshtein said. He said Botvinnik appealed to Molotov, telling him that if the match wasn't held, Reshevsky would challenge Alekhine and win.

Botvinnik never responded to Vainshtein's version. But his friend Viktor Malkin confirmed a small part of it. "With the help of a highly-placed protector [Molotov], Mikhail Moiseyevich managed to get Vainshtein out of his post," Malkin wrote.

Another account comes to us from Bronstein. "In my opinion, those at the meeting didn't understand well what was happening," he told Sergei Voronkov. The meeting began with criticism of the state of Soviet chess and the failure to revive the newspaper *64,* which had been abruptly halted in 1941 after the Nazi invasion.

"Then Botvinnik raised the question about the match," Bronstein said. "I well remember how Boris Samoilovich rose — tall, handsome, young, in a military uniform — and declared, 'I must tell you we are not here to earn ranks (then he pointed at his epaulettes), or to receive awards (and showed the medals on his chest).' Everyone was silent." "Now concerning your newspaper *64,"* Vainshtein added. "I must report that until now there has been no reestablishing of the newspaper's publication because of the [damaged] industry." ("These words I remember exactly," Bronstein recalled. "I was struck by there being no paper in the country.")

Vainshtein addressed Botvinnik: "And concerning Alekhine, I don't understand how you can shake the hand which is stained with the blood of Auschwitz and Majdanek," he said. He was alluding to Alekhine's courtship of Nazi brass, such as Hans Frank who would be hanged at Nuremberg for war crimes. Vainshtein added that he had checked with Beria's deputy, Lt. Gen. Stepan Mamulov. Mamulov told him that if Alekhine stepped foot in the USSR he would be arrested. Bronstein said his mentor had reason to be outraged by Botvinnik for organizing attacks on him. After all, he said, it was Vainshtein — not Molotov or Dmitry Zhimerin, as Botvinnik claimed — who had gotten Botvinnik transferred to Moscow and provided him with other perks.

It's unclear how much the others present understood about the Alekhine match. They apparently did not know about the Carlton agreement or about Botvinnik's contacts with Molotov. The rest of the world learned about Alekhine's machinations only in the fall of 1945. Then in self-exile in Portugal, Alekhine disclosed his negotiations with the Soviets in an article titled "Two World Wars Have Ruined Me" in the British magazine *Chess*. Why did Alekhine open up then? The reason appears to be that his chances of finding

another opponent were dwindling fast. At various times during the war he hinted that his next challenger would be Reshevsky, Fine or Keres. But after the war, Fine and American chess organizers called for a boycott of Alekhine. Keres' future was in doubt. Botvinnik must have looked like his best ticket out of Portugal.

Post-Alekhine

The Soviets had repeatedly shunned team matches with foreigners and denounced the "bourgeois" Olympiads, which the United States won in 1931, 1933, 1935 and 1937. But they welcomed a two-round U.S.–USSR match with moves sent by radio during September 1–4, 1945. It was a mismatch. Botvinnik was one of five members of the ten-man Soviet team who won both of his games.

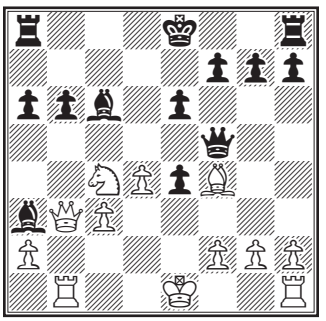
U.S.–USSR radio match 1945
Botvinnik–Arnold Denker
D13 Slav Defense

1. d4 d5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. c4 c6 4. c×d5! c×d5 5. Nc3 Nc6 6. Bf4

Denker, then the U.S. Champion, had lost badly in the first round, the "Botvinnik Variation" game. Botvinnik correctly guessed that he would be eager for revenge in a sharp Slav line like the Meran Variation. But 4. c×d5! avoided that and led to a symmetrical position in which having the first move must favor White. Botvinnik's game with Smyslov in the 14th Soviet Championship showed the dangers to Black: 6. ... e6 7. e3 Be7 8. Bd3 0–0 9. h3 Bd7 10. 0–0 a6 11. Rc1 Be8 12. Bb1 Nh5 13. Bh2 f5? 14. Na4! Bd6 15. Nc5 B×h2+ 16. N×h2 Qe7 17. Qb3 Rf7 18. g4! and White went on to win.

6. ... Qa5 7. e3 Ne4 8. Qb3 e6 9. Bd3 Bb4 10. Rc1 N×c3 11. b×c3 Ba3 12. Rb1 b6? 13. e4!

Botvinnik thought 11. ... Ba3 was Black's biggest mistake in the game. But 12. ... 0–0 13. 0–0 Be7! would have left White with a minimal edge. The text is strong because 13. ... 0–0 14. e×d5 e×d5 15. 0–0 sets up a strong threat of 16. Qc2 h6 17. Rb5. For example, 15. ... Bg4 16. Qc2 B×f3 17. Rb5 Qa6 18. g×f3 costs Black at least a pawn.



After 17. ... Qf5

13. ... d×e4 14. Bb5!

Denker probably counted on 14. B×e4 Bb7, with a threat of ... N×d4!.

14. ... Bd7 15. Nd2 a6 16. B×c6 B×c6 17. Nc4 Qf5 *(diagram)*

There's nothing much in 18. Nd6+ B×d6. But White would get a clear edge from 18. Q×a3 Q×f4 19. R×b6 Bd5 20. Nd6+. He preferred:

18. Bd6! e3

Desperation since the bishop is trapped (18. ... B×d6?? 19. N×d6+ and N×f5) and because 18. ... Bd5 19. B×a3 b5 loses to 20. Nd6+.

19. N×e3 Q×b1+ 20. Q×b1 Bd6 21. Q×b6 Kd7 22. Qb3!

Despite winning the queen, 22. 0–0 Rhb8 23. Qa5 Rb5 24. Qa4 B×h2+ would be difficult (25. K×h2?? Rh5+ and 25. Kh1 Rh5).

22. ... Rab8 23. Qc2 Rb5 24. 0–0 Rh5 25. h3 Rb8 26. c4 g6 27. Ng4 Rf5 28. Ne5+ B×e5 29. d×e5 R×e5 30. Qd2+! 1–0

Black resigns in view of 31. Qd6 after a king move to e8 or c8 and 31. Rd1 and 32. Qd6+ after a king move to c7 or e7.

The Soviets won with a stunning 15½–4½ score. "Well done, boys," were Stalin's words "unofficially" passed on to the team, Botvinnik said. United States Ambassador Averell Harriman "invited us to a reception and showed the film 'Casablanca' with Paul Robeson," he added in *Analytical.* Botvinnik's memoirs show he was somewhat familiar with American pop culture, such as being able to dance the Charleston or appreciate movies starring Deanna Durbin. But he had mistaken Dooley ("As Time Goes By") Wilson with Robeson.

The Alekhine Problem

About two weeks after the radio match Botvinnik learned that a letter "signed by almost all leading Soviet masters" had been sent to Stalin supporting a match with Alekhine. This was a familiar propaganda technique, a "collective" letter to show unity. Only two masters refused to sign it, on the grounds that Botvinnik was not strong enough. He didn't name them but strongly hinted they were Bronstein and Boleslavsky. ("By strange coincidence both were close friends of Vainshtein.") Nikolai Romanov, the second secretary of Komsomol, who had replaced Snegov as head of Sports Committee, and others were also opposed.

And then there was the problem of foreign masters who wanted to strip Alekhine of his title and fill the championship vacancy with a tournament. Botvinnik said this put the Soviets in a difficult position. "It would seem simple: deprive Alekhine of his title and by means of a competition determine the strongest player all over again!" But suppose that happens and afterwards Alekhine could disprove the World War II charges against him. "What then? Who in that case will be world champion?" And besides, he said, "Alekhine in politics is a pawn but in chess he is great. Can a new champion be recognized if he doesn't defeat Alekhine?" What Botvinnik didn't say — and perhaps didn't know — is that Alekhine was in serious physical decline after years of alcohol abuse and would have lost to *any* of his likely challengers.

Nevertheless, Alekhine, more than 2,400 miles away from Moscow, was cleaning up his act. In January 1946 the *British Chess Magazine* ran a letter in which he denied writing

his *Pariser Zeitung* articles and said he played in occupied Europe because it was "my only means of subsistence." Botvinnik finally won approval to send a formal challenge to Alekhine and did so on February 4, 1946, through Sir George Thomas and British Chess Federation president Job Nightingale Derbyshire. He knew Thomas from their two tournament games and had spent a day at Derbyshire's country estate before Hastings 1934-35. The letter read: "I regret that the war prevented our match in 1939. I again challenge you to a world championship match. If you agree, I am waiting for your reply, in which I ask you to give your opinion of the dates and venue of the match."

The BCF offered to host the match, which was "quite understandable as the prize fund was guaranteed by the Soviet Union," as Botvinnik put it. The British proposed to hold the match in Nottingham in August 1946, when BCF president Derbyshire would celebrate his 80th birthday. Now that he knew the match would happen, Botvinnik wanted more time to prepare. He tried to push the date to February 1947. He also sent the *vlasti* an inventory of what he would need to beat Alekhine. His wish lists even covered items such as "underwear and children's clothes" for his family, hospital accommodation for his ailing mother and an increased ration of 1.5 kilograms of caviar. He added that he would need the services of six people, including Rokhlin, Ragozin and Goldberg.

Matters were moving along quickly. On March 23, 1946, the BCF finalized plans for the match and sent Alekhine a telegram with an official proposal. The next day, a Sunday, Botvinnik was hosting friends for tea when he got a phone call. "It's Podtserob speaking," it began. "Terrible news. Alekhine died unexpectedly three hours ago." Boris Podtserob, the Botvinnik friend, was obviously connected to the upper reaches of Soviet power. He had attended the crucial Yalta, Potsdam and Teheran Conferences as senior aide to Molotov, for example. Yet it seems strange that he would know *that* quickly of Alekhine's death.

Suspicions about how Alekhine died in his Estoril, Portugal, hotel room have persisted. Had he been murdered by NKVD agents? Poisoned by a waiter? Botvinnik later suggested that Alekhine died "on the street" and not in his hotel room of a heart attack or choking on a piece of meat, as press reports said. Dmitry Paperno, the pianist, addressed "How Alekhine Died" in *Shakhmatny Vestnik* in 1992 after spending two weeks in Estoril. He noted that a heart attack wasn't mentioned on the death certificate but choking on meat was. But a famous photograph of Alekhine's face in death showed no sign of choking. "The circumstances of his death remain unclear," Botvinnik concluded in 1991.

On to Groningen

The world championship match Botvinnik had for eight years fought for died with Alekhine. But efforts to fill the championship vacancy arose quickly. One was revealed to the *vlasti* on June 1, 1946, when Nikolai Romanov sent a letter to Andrei Zhdanov, one of the three or four most powerful people in the USSR. The Americans had offered to pay all expenses for a 20-round world championship tournament in 1947, Romanov told him. It would be held in Los Angeles and consist of six players — Fine, Reshevsky, Botvinnik, Euwe and "two other Soviets," presumably to be chosen by authorities in Moscow.

Romanov told Zhdanov how favorable this was to the USSR. There is documentary evidence that this message reached the highest levels. Euwe had asked permission to visit the USSR to discuss the world title, Romanov added. Stalin later signed a file, marked "Strictly Secret," saying it was decided on September 5 to allow Euwe into the country.

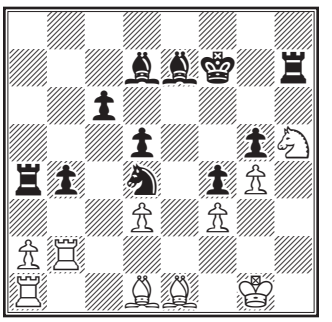
But now FIDE stepped in. Botvinnik, Fine, Reshevsky and others had indicated since the end of the war that they saw no role for the international federation in the world championship. But in July, at a FIDE congress at Winterthur, Switzerland, FIDE president Alexander Rueb proposed a championship tournament in 1947, under the federation's auspices, with Euwe, Reshevsky, Fine, Botvinnik, Keres and Smyslov. In other words, it was the same idea as the American plan but with Keres and Smyslov identified as the two additional Soviets. The FIDE also suggested that if the winners of the first major postwar tournaments — to be held at Groningen, the Netherlands, beginning August 13 and at Prague in October — were not among the six designated championship seeds, they would play a match for the right to be the seventh invitee.

This was FIDE's way of looking for a worthy championship candidate besides the ones who had made their names before the war. But little attention was given to two former candidates. One was Salo Flohr, who could stake the same kind of claim on the title that Botvinnik did. He, too, had been scheduled to play a match with Alekhine. And if Euwe was invited because he was a former world champion, didn't the two-time challenger Yefim Bogolyubov deserve some recognition?

But in the Soviet view, Flohr's mediocre performances in USSR events had cost Flohr his standing. And Bogolyubov's participation was unthinkable because he had renounced his Soviet citizenship two decades before. When FIDE bestowed the international grandmaster title upon 27 players in 1950, Bogolyubov wasn't on the list. Fritz Sämisch was. Slava Ragozin was. Even Jacques Mieses. But not Bogolyubov.

In any event, Botvinnik, Ganochka and their four-year-old daughter traveled to the Groningen tournament with four other Soviet invitees — Smyslov, Boleslavsky, Kotov and Flohr — along with a delegation head, the Byelorussian master Gavril Veresov. The delegation was put up at the Hotel Frigge and they managed to supplement their meager food with rations from the Soviet embassy. That enabled Ganochka to cook meals. Despite FIDE's ambitious plan, Botvinnik came to Groningen with the conviction that if Euwe won the tournament, the Dutchman would assume the championship title with the support of the West. Botvinnik showed he meant to stop that by winning his first five games *(diagram)*.

Erik Lundin–Botvinnik,
Groningen 1946
After 46. Bd1



Black should win eventually after 46. ... Ra3 in view of 47. B×b4 B×b4 48. R×b4 R×d3. But he found a faster way:

46. ... c5!! 47. B×a4 N×f3+! 48. Kf2 B×g4!

This wins the trapped knight, after which the passed kingside pawn(s) should prevail. Botvinnik noted that 49. Bc6 Ke6 50. Be8 does not save White because of 50. ... Ne5 51. Kf1 B×h5 52. Rh2 Bg6!.

49. Bd1 Ne5! 50. B×g4 N×g4+ 51. Kg1 R×h5 52. Rg2 Bf6 0–1

After a move of the attacked rook Black would win with 53. ... Bd4+ 54. Kf1 f3! (55. Rg1 Nh2 mate). This victory helped Botvinnik take the lead, followed closely by Euwe. He benefited from some luck. He was lost after 24 moves against Alberic O'Kelly, for instance, yet managed to win.

Ganochka again proved invaluable, as cook and gatekeeper: When her husband adjourned she sat in front of their hotel room door to make sure no one bothered him. His "home" analysis proved invaluable when he adjourned a rook ending with Euwe in the tenth round. It closely resembled one won by Emanuel Lasker against Akiba Rubinstein at St. Petersburg 1914. If Euwe won, as Lasker did, he would almost certainly be named world champion, Botvinnik felt. "I ran back to the Hotel Frigge. My wife had a meal ready but I waved it away," he recalled. The ending appeared lost until he realized each side had one more pawn than in Lasker–Rubinstein. This allowed him to offer a trade of rooks into a pawn endgame that he realized would be drawn.

To carry off his escape he needed to play the role of the doomed loser, "with a downcast head," as he put it. This was a new side to Botvinnik. He had seen Capablanca and others use their amateur acting skills at critical moments in a game. At Groningen, Botvinnik began his acting career, by faking despair. "Euwe slapped me on the shoulder in a patronizing, sympathetic gesture. In answer I nod my grief, as if saying I realized what was up," he wrote. This set Euwe up for a surprise Botvinnik move. When Euwe plunged into thought, Botvinnik winked at Veresov. Several moves later a draw was agreed. It was greeted by stunned silence from the crowd of more than 2,000 fans in the playing hall, he wrote.

One of Botvinnik's finest games at Groningen came against his 1926 team match opponent:

Groningen 1946
Gösta Stoltz–Botvinnik
C00 Sicilian Defense

1. e4 e6 2. Qe2

Stoltz had been experimenting with this anti-theoretical move since a 1930 game with Gideon Ståhlberg that continued 2. ... e5!? 3. f4! e×f4 4. d4!? Qh4+ 5. Kd1!. Botvinnik adopts a more solid Sicilian Defense setup.

2. ... c5 3. g3 Nc6 4. Bg2 Nge7 5. Nc3 g6 6. d3 Bg7 7. Be3 d5! 8. e×d5? Nd4!

Either White underestimated this move (9. B×d4 c×d4 favors Black) or saw only 8. ... e×d5 9. B×c5. Reuben Fine was so impressed that he gave double exclamation points to Black's seventh and eighth moves.

9. Qd2 e×d5 10. Nce2 h6 11. Qc1 Bf5

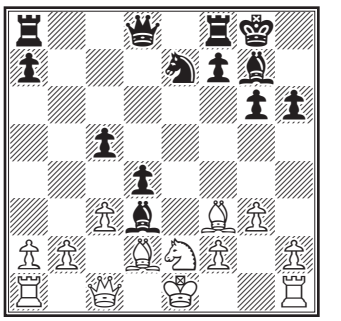
Despite White's loss of time, 12. N×d4! c×d4 13. Bd2 Rc8 14. Qd1 is only slightly uncomfortable for him.

12. c3? N×e2 13. N×e2 d4!

Stoltz likely counted on 13. ... B×d3 14. B×c5, with a double-edged position after 14. ... B×e2 15. K×e2 0–0 16. Rd1.

14. Bd2 B×d3 15. B×b7 0–0! 16. Bf3 *(diagram)*

White loses quickly after 16. B×a8 Q×a8 17. Rf1 B×e2 18. K×e2 Qe4+. The Black rook will remain en prise at a8 for seven moves.



After 16. Bf3

16. ... g5! 17. 0–0 Ng6!

The knight is headed to e5 with decisive effect. Again 18. B×a8 Q×a8 loses (19. Re1 Ne5 and ... Nf3+). Botvinnik was accurate in *Analytical* when he said that in the first half of the tournament he used "the method of domination, perhaps no worse than Karpov has done in recent times."

18. Re1 Ne5 19. Bg2 Ba6! 20. Qd1 Nd3 21. Qa4

And here it's 21. B×a8 Q×a8 22. Qa4 Bb7 23. Rf1 Bh1! 24. f3 B×f3 that wins.

21. ... Qf6 22. f4 Rae8 23. Bc6 N×e1 24. B×e8 Nf3+ 25. Kf2 N×d2

Game over.

26. Bc6 B×e2 27. K×e2 d×c3 28. b×c3 Q×c3 29. Rd1 Rd8 30. Be4 g×f4 31. g×f4 Qh3 32. Rg1 Qh5+ 33. Ke3 Qh3+ 34. Ke2 Q×h2+ 35. Rg2 Qh5+ 36. Ke3 Qh3+ 37. Ke2 Qe6 0–1

But this 11th round game was followed by another late-tournament letdown. Botvinnik nearly lost in the next round to Flohr and did lose as White to Kotov two rounds later and to outsider Dan Yanofsky of Canada the following day. He blamed his "nervous state — there were reports in the Dutch press that Smyslov and Boleslavsky had lost to me on orders from the Kremlin."

But Botvinnik rallied with three straight wins. He led Euwe by half a point on the eve of his final game, against Miguel Najdorf. Najdorf, who had White, offered Botvinnik a draw before the game.

Botvinnik should have seen the offer as a godsend. A draw would guarantee at least a tie for first place. But he made what could have been the worst miscalculation of his life: He learned that Kotov wanted to try to beat Euwe. Botvinnik imagined Kotov taking risks and losing. That would mean Euwe would tie for first place. Why a draw would be so bad has never been explained. After all, before play began Botvinnik feared that if Euwe finished solely in first place he would be declared champion.

So he refused Najdorf's draw offer — and was crushed. But the Soviets dodged disaster when Kotov pulled off another upset. Botvinnik won the tournament by half a point. As a result, the idea of declaring Euwe champion lost credibility — and a proposal for a Botvinnik–Euwe world championship match gained traction. But Botvinnik still wanted a match-tournament.

VOKS

Groningen ended September 7 and a face-to-face U.S.–USSR match in Moscow was scheduled to begin five days later. A train trip would have taken too long in the postwar Europe of 1946. So, Botvinnik and his family went to The Hague and hitched a ride with the rest of the Soviet delegation to Moscow on a Li-2, a Soviet light bomber/cargo/passenger plane. It was Botvinnik's first flight.

On the eve of the match, the exhausted USSR team was greeted with disturbing news at the Hotel Moskva. Nikolai Mikhailov, first secretary of the Central Committee of Komsomol, told them they must beat the Americans by a bigger score than in the radio match. He underlined the gravity of the match. (The Cold War was just beginning. The U.S. announced plans on September 6 to keep troops in Europe indefinitely.) "I looked round at my colleagues," Botvinnik wrote in *Achieving the Aim.* "Some were dumbfounded, some pale with fear." He said he had to speak up because under such an order they might even lose the match. "Politely, mildly but precisely I express the opinion that we should aim for a 15–5 score, that is, each player should try to win one game and draw the other." No one else spoke and Mikhailov, along with the Sports Committee's Romanov, left in silence.

In the first round the Soviets scored 7–3, after Botvinnik drew an endgame two pawns down against Reshevsky. But the concluding round began badly. Botvinnik was in trouble — not lost, as he claimed — before Reshevsky got into time trouble. At one point the American forgot to punch his clock. Botvinnik did not alert him, as he had done with Bogolyubov at Nottingham. The difference, he said, was that this was a team event. Reshevsky blundered away the Exchange on the 41st move.

The rest of the team was headed to an even score that day while Botvinnik adjourned. That night Romanov phoned him for a prediction, addressing him by his first name and the more familiar form of "you." "I'm working on it, Nikolai Nikolayevich," he replied. It paid off when Reshevsky quickly erred. The match ended in a 12½–7½ Soviet victory. After Reshevsky resigned a delighted Romanov gave him "a bear hug."

The next morning Botvinnik, Keres, Smyslov and Reshevsky, as well as Euwe, who

had been the match arbiter, met to discuss the world championship at the office of the Soviet foreign propaganda arm, VOKS. Fine had already flown home, saying he had pressing matters to attend to. "Could these matters be more important than the world championship?" Botvinnik wrote later — indicating that in his mind, nothing could be.

At the VOKS summit he explained his own proposal for a match-tournament. Euwe and Reshevsky didn't want to make a commitment, he said. "It was not hard to guess that they had come to an agreement which would be at the cost of the Soviet players." Botvinnik countered by threatening to issue an open letter the next day telling "what happened at our meeting." He said Romanov "looked daggers at me" and the VOKS chairman exclaimed, "What's this, threats?"

But Euwe backed down, Botvinnik said. The Dutchman and Reshevsky signed a gentleman's agreement to hold the match-tournament in The Hague and Moscow. In his memoirs Botvinnik made no mention of a FIDE role in such a tournament. But at the end of his life, he made it sound as if the players relinquished their championship claims to the international federation at this meeting.

He contrasted that situation with the "commercialization" of the championship in the 1990s. "Six grandmasters voluntarily renounced the right to the world championship, giving the title to FIDE," he said. But "48 years later FIDE virtually gives this title to a private commercial company." He added Cicero's classic rebuke, "Oh the times, oh the morals!"

9. Champion

But there were more twists to come. Nikolai Romanov summoned Botvinnik to his Sports Committee office in December 1946 and said "We have to repudiate the agreement." The *vlasti* had taken a hard line: "The whole event must take place in Moscow." Botvinnik claims, "I decided to give up chess." The best evidence of that was his refusal to play in that month's Soviet Championship. When there was no mention of him in the tournament reports, "relatives phoned up, suspecting that something bad had happened."

But whether or not his retirement was sincere, his views commanded respect. An article he wrote for the December 1946 *Shakhmaty v SSSR*— before his meeting with Romanov — was reprinted in *Chess* in March 1947 and in slightly different form in *Chess Review* in May. In it he called for "an authoritative World Chess Federation." He said the Soviet players were looking forward to a world championship match-tournament that would enable "the strongest player to emerge the victor." By the time the articles appeared in the West the *vlasti* had changed their minds. The "gentleman's agreement" was acceptable, Slava Ragozin, who was emerging as the Soviet Union's senior chess diplomat, told Botvinnik. Furthermore the USSR would end its boycott of the "bourgeois" international federation and join FIDE at the next congress, to be held July 30–August 2 in The Hague.

Ragozin, along with a rising Sports Committee official named Dmitry Postnikov and Mikhail Yudovich, then the chief editor of *Shakhmaty v SSSR,* were sent to represent the USSR. But they arrived two days late at The Hague. The FIDE delegates, concluding that the Soviet absence meant that Moscow had changed its mind once more, considered alternatives to a match-tournament. One was to declare Euwe champion, Ragozin recalled. The other was to hold an Euwe–Reshevsky match for the title. "The majority of delegates were for the second proposal," he wrote. But once the Soviet delegation showed up, the match-tournament proposal was reinstated and endorsed by the FIDE delegates. Postnikov then took part in a drawing of White and Black pawns to determine the venue. He drew the winning White one and said the Soviets preferred to host the second half of history's first world championship tournament.

Battle-Tested

Botvinnik approached the task before him methodically: He drew up a "Plan of Preparation for World Championship 1948" with a six-month timetable. Among the highlights was scheduling September 5 to October 4, 1947, for rest in a sanatorium. Then came a period, until October 20, of collecting research about his opponents. From then until November 15 he intended to analyze openings with Ragozin and play training games. Two games have survived and one was a King's Gambit that Botvinnik accepted. Since he often chose the openings of his training games one wonders: Was he preparing for Paul Keres or looking ahead to David Bronstein?

To become battle-tested he planned to enter the next Soviet Championship, set for November 15 to December 10. But instead he took part in a Mikhail Chigorin Memorial tournament in Moscow from November 25 to December 23. It was billed as a "Pan-Slav" event, a thinly disguised way of not inviting Westerners. Botvinnik appeared out of form as he opened with a 2½–1½ score. He hit his stride in mid-tournament:

Chigorin Memorial, Moscow 1947
Botvinnik–Alexandr Tsvetkov
E05 Catalan Opening

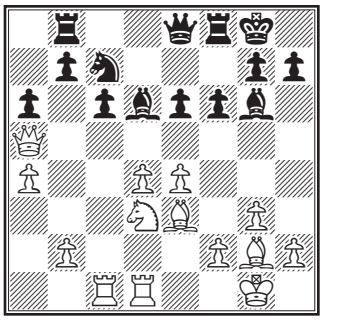
1. c4 Nf6 2. d4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. Bg2 Be7 5. Nf3 0–0 6. 0–0 d×c4 7. Qc2 Nbd7?

His inexperienced Bulgarian opponent seemed unfamiliar with freeing ideas such as 7. ... a6 and ... b5 or aiming for a quick ... c5.

8. Nbd2 Nb6 9. N×c4 N×c4 10. Q×c4 Rb8 11. Bf4 Nd5 12. Bd2 Bd7 13. Ne5 Be8 14. Rac1 c6 15. Rfd1

White has a typical Catalan space edge, which will grow after e2–e4.

15. ... f6 16. Nd3 Bf7 17. Qc2 Bd6 18. e4! Nc7 19. Be3 Qe8 20. a4 a6 21. Qc3 Bg6 22. Qa5! *(diagram)*



After 22. Qa5

The e4–e5 threat allows White to eliminate the bishop that protects e6.

22. ... Rf7 23. Nf4! Rd7 24. N×g6 Q×g6 25. Qb6!

Now he threatens 26. e5 Bf8 27. B×c6 or 26. R×c6 Na8 27. Qa7.

25. ... Qh5 26. Qb3 Rdd8 27. d5! e×d5 28. Ba7 Rbc8 29. Q×b7 f5?! 30. e×d5 1–0

Resignation is justified by 30. ... c×d5 31. R×d5! Qe8 32. R×d6 R×d6 33. R×c7 R×c7 34. Q×c7.

The tournament featured some members of the generation that would emerge as stars in the 1950s, including Svetozar Gligorić, Luděk Pachman and Ratmir Kholmov.

Kholmov came from a politically suspect family. His father defected to the Communists during the Civil War, joined the Party in 1918 and served in government posts. But he was arrested in the late 1920s and sent to build the White Sea-Baltic Canal (along with tens of thousands of other convicts, many of whom died under horrific conditions). He survived, returned to his Arkhangelsk home, got another official post — only to be arrested in the fatal year of 1938. He was never heard from again. Kholmov, a sailor, had spent part of World War II interned by the Japanese after his ship was seized. As a result of these and other black marks on his record, he never got to play in a Western country until 1990, when he was 65.

Chigorin Memorial, Moscow 1947
Botvinnik–Ratmir Kholmov
E47 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. c4 Nf6 2. Nc3 e6 3. d4 Bb4 4. e3 0–0 5. Bd3 d6 6. Ne2 e5

Keres and Smyslov had experimented with Black's unusual setup.

7. 0–0 Nc6 8. d5 Nb8? 9. a3 B×c3 10. N×c3 a5 11. e4

But now Black has no compensation for White's two bishops and superior pawn structure.

11. ... Ne8 12. Be3 f6 13. Qd2 Rf7 14. b4 Nd7 15. c5! b6 16. c×b6!

White would have a clear edge after 16. ... c×b6 17. Nb5 or 17. Bb5.

16. ... N×b6 17. b×a5! R×a5 18. Nb5 Ra8 19. Qc2 Na4 20. Rfb1 g6 21. Na7! c5

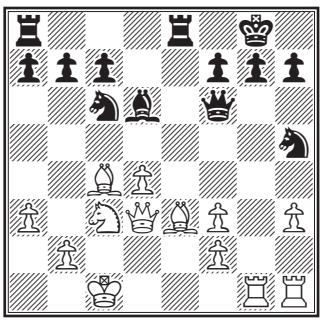
Since Black had to give up his light-squared bishop, 21. ... Bd7 22. Nc6 B×c6 23. Q×c6 f5 was a better try.

22. N×c8 Q×c8 23. Bb5! Rfa7

Material is lost (23. ... Nb6 24. B×e8 Q×e8 25. R×b6).

24. Bc6! f5 25. f3 f4 26. Bf2 g5 27. Rb3 g4 28. f×g4 Q×g4 29. B×a8 R×a8 30. Rab1 1–0

But in round 13 Botvinnik made one of the worst blunders of his career *(diagram)*.



Botvinnik–Pachman, Chigorin Memorial, Moscow 1947
After 16. ... Qf6

Despite his pawn weaknesses White would have a small edge after 17. Ne4 because 17. ... Q×f3? loses to 18. Ng5. But he played **17. Rg5??**, apparently expecting 18. ... Nf4 19. Qf5. He was surprised by **17. ... R×e3!** (18. Q×e3 Bf4). He played on, a piece down, until move 45.

Despite telling Flohr in 1933 that he liked the number, Botvinnik had been plagued by 13th rounds before and had expressed fear before this game, according to Pachman. "I was quite surprised to hear that, for I had not expected the scientific brain of a future world champion to harbor such a superstition," he wrote. Gligorić recalled that this game was one of the rare times when Botvinnik struggled with his iron self-control. "He cracked his fingers" and "his wife calmed him down as he was putting on his coat" as he left, Gligorić wrote.

Nevertheless, the most important game of the tournament for Botvinnik came in the next, penultimate round when he faced Keres. Keres needed a win to take first prize. But Botvinnik had a different goal. "I decided with the help of this game to rob my main rival in the forthcoming event" — the match-tournament — "of his confidence," Botvinnik wrote. He believed that a win with the Black pieces would be a crippling blow, like his 1944 victory over Smyslov, which he believed had psychologically damaged Smyslov for the foreseeable future. He got his win in 80 moves. "Botvinnik was a chess knock-outer. He tried not simply to win but to crush an opponent," recalled Yuri Averbakh. "Fischer was the same." The win helped him take first prize with an 11–4 score.

Countdown to The Hague

While details of the match-tournament were being worked out, Reuben Fine officially withdrew, and for decades after would give conflicting explanations of why. The FIDE decided against replacing him. When Botvinnik got his copy of the tournament schedule "I was amazed." Thanks to the byes created by Fine's withdrawal and Dutch national holidays, one of the five players would be punished with such a lopsided schedule that he would have six straight days off.

Botvinnik also found that the players were assigned hotel rooms miles from the playing hall, in Scheveningen. This would violate one of the tenets of his sacred regimen. "Just before play, one should take a walk of 15 to 20 minutes in order to concentrate oneself, and not travel in a car hearing irrelevant conversation," he wrote. But when Keres and Smyslov refused to mount a joint protest with him, he "naturally started to suspect" that they had banded together against him. He said he confirmed his suspicion when, in a meeting with them, "I suggested to my comrades that we should be opponents at the board, but friends as regards questions of organization." He offered his hand. They refused to shake it and Botvinnik rebuked them in what he called "a fit of temper." (Smyslov, in a 1998 interview, shrugged off what he called "some 'strange' demands of Mikhail Moiseyevich.")

So, Botvinnik was on his own. He scheduled his arrival in the Netherlands for February 10, nearly three weeks before the first round. When he got to The Hague he told

the Dutch organizers that he would be staying at a hotel that would be a 20-minute walk from the playing site, the great hall of the City Zoo, regardless of what they had planned. "They accused me of all the sins in the calendar," he said. But the Soviet consul in The Hague intervened and found an appropriate hotel.

The ceremonial opening occurred on March 1 and Botvinnik, as first in alphabetical order, drew the first lot. It was a "1." Botvinnik took this as a sign of good luck and smiled broadly as the audience applauded, wrote Alexander Koblents, then a journalist. When play began the next day an audience of more than 2,000 turned out. They were allowed to eat, smoke, and even play dominoes or chess, Koblents said, because of lenient spectator rules that were designed to maximize gate receipts.

Throughout the tournament, the games that drew the most attention were Botvinnik's with Reshevsky. There was no escaping the political undertones when an American played a Russian in 1948. A week before the tournament began the Czech Communist Party seized power in Prague. The day after the following game was played the Czech foreign minister died, officially from suicide but more likely from murder.

World Championship, The Hague 1948
Botvinnik–Samuel Reshevsky
E51 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 d5 5. a3 Be7!

Ten years later, the lesson of Botvinnik–Capablanca was understood. The position takes on a Queen's Gambit Declined character.

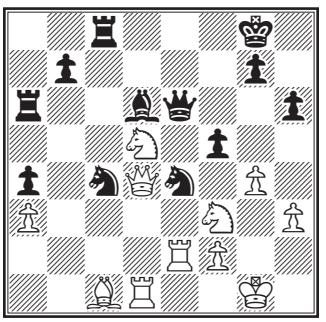
6. Nf3 0–0 7. b4 Nbd7 8. Bb2 c6 9. Bd3 d×c4 10. B×c4 Bd6 11. Ne2?

The stops 11. ... e5 but exposes White's queenside.

11. ... a5! 12. b5 Nb6 13. Bd3 c×b5 14. B×b5 Bd7

White is vulnerable to ... a4, ... Na4 or a later ... Nc4.

15. Qb3 a4 16. Qd3 Ra5 17. Nc3 Qe8! 18. B×d7 Q×d7 19. 0–0 Rc8 20. e4 Nc4 21. Bc1 e5 22. Rd1 e×d4 23. Q×d4 Qe6 24. Ra2 h6 25. h3 Ra6



After 28. g4

Both men were already in time trouble. Reshevsky is preparing ... Ne5 which would have been faulty here: 25. ... Ne5 26. Q×d6 N×f3+ 27. g×f3 Q×h3 28. Qg3 Q×g3+ 29. f×g3 and now 29. ... R×c3 30. Rd8+ and 31. Bd2!.

26. Nd5 N×e4!? 27. Re2 f5 28. g4 *(diagram)*

Black would get a slim edge from 28. ... Ne5 but better is 28. ... Ng5!. For example, 29. Qd3 N×f3+ 30. Q×f3 f×g4 or 29. R×e6 N×f3+ 30. Kg2 N×d4 31. R×d4 f×g4. He would win outright after 28. ... Ng5! 29. N×g5? Q×e2 30. Nf6+ g×f6 31. Qd5+ Kh8 32. Nf7+ Kh7.

28. ... Bc5? 29. g×f5 Q×f5?

Black set a trap, 30. Q×c5 and 31. Ne7+ Kh7 32. N×f5, would have been met by 30. ... R×c5 and 32. ... Nc3! But he missed a chance for equality with 29. ... B×d4! 30. f×e6 B×f2+ 31. R×f2 N×f2 32. K×f2 R×e6. "World champions are born. This is fate," Smyslov said later. "How else can it be explained that such gifted players as, let's say, Keres, Reshevsky" never won the title.

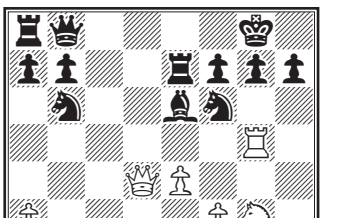
30. Q×e4! Q×h3 31. Nh2 Rcc6 32. Nf4 1–0

"In eight minutes, Reshevsky made four weak moves and forfeited on the 32nd move," Botvinnik summed up. He said Reshevsky's "vicious habit" of getting into time pressure made it clear he could not contend for first place. "In the championships of America, such practice could perhaps even help him. But our encounter showed the true value of time pressure tactics," he wrote. Years later, when Botvinnik ridiculed faster time limits, some critics said it was because he was a naturally slow player who was prone to error when short of time. But David Bronstein said, "As far as I know, he plays lightning chess splendidly. I cannot recall a single case of Botvinnik leaving a piece en prise under time pressure. I do know games in which he won with the flag of his clock just about to fall. For example, he twice defeated Reshevsky in this way," he said.

The following round set the tournament tone. Keres had started 2–0 but Botvinnik was certain that the psychological damage he inflicted at the Chigorin Memorial was bound to tell. "I merely had to keep my spirits up!" he said in *Achieving the Aim.* He adjourned a pawn up and with the help of Salo Flohr, who was sharing the seconding duties with Ragozin, steered his way to victory at move 58. After Keres resigned, Botvinnik recalled, an American general rushed up and shook his hand. "I realized that there are chess players in the USA among the armed forces as well!" he wrote.

The tournament's second cycle was much like the first. Before the tournament, Botvinnik had warned Keres and Smyslov that whoever got the six-day "rest" in this cycle would lose on the seventh day. It turned out to be Keres, who found himself lost after 19 moves *(diagram)*.

Botvinnik–Keres,
World Championship,
The Hague 1948
After 20. Rg5



There was no salvation in 20. ... Ne8 because of 21. Nh5 f6 22. N×f6+ N×f6 23. Q×f6. Keres played 20. ... Nbd7. Then came 21. R×g7+! K×g7 22. Nh5+ Kg6 (other moves lose to 23. N×f6). Botvinnik replied 23. Qe3, which forces mate. Keres stared at

the position, waiting until he was 30 seconds from forfeiture. Then he stopped his clock, signed his scoresheet and left without a word. After this game "it became clear that Paul could no longer hope to win the event," Botvinnik wrote.

Border Guards and Vlasti

The tournament shifted to Moscow during a two-week-plus break. Botvinnik, Euwe and a Dutch entourage went by train and encountered a series of postwar and Cold War related difficulties. A crisis arose after a change of trains at Brest when a Soviet customs official discovered Euwe's notebooks of opening analysis. He suspected the numbers and Dutch writing were spy code. Botvinnik interceded and regained the papers after several hours, according to a delighted Euwe. "The eventual result was that I was allowed to keep my papers, provided I signed a declaration that they contained nothing detrimental to the Russian state," he said. Botvinnik joked, "Yet aren't your variations directed against Soviet players?" Euwe replied in kind: "My variations are either bad or they're meant for Reshevsky."

Nevertheless, copies of his notes somehow found their way to the Soviet players, Garry Kasparov wrote in *My Great Predecessors.* Whether Botvinnik benefited from them is unclear. In his first game in Moscow he crushed Euwe's Meran Variation, using an innovation on the 14th move. Analysis indicates Euwe was lost after his 16th move. If Euwe's notes showed that he would adopt a Meran — or that he had no improvements before move 14 — the border incident may have given Botvinnik an easy point.

But before that game Botvinnik was summoned to Central Committee headquarters for a meeting with Andrei Zhdanov, Kliment Voroshilov and Lt. Gen. Arkady Apollonov. Apollonov, a first-category player and former officer in the security "organs," had replaced Nikolai Romanov as head of Sports Committee earlier in 1948 (because Stalin was outraged by the Soviet team performance in the world skating championship). Voroshilov, a much-decorated general, was in charge of sports for the Council of Ministers, the newly created highest administrative body of the USSR. Therefore the three men who ordered Botvinnik to report to them represented the *vlasti* most directly responsible for Soviet chess.

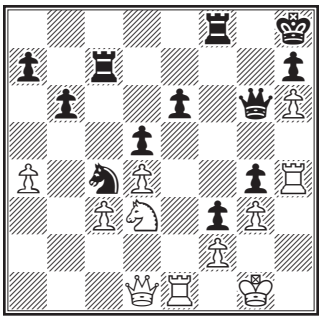
"Don't you think that the American Reshevsky will become world champion?" Zhdanov asked. Botvinnik understood that he was being tested: Before the tournament "certain circles" had predicted a Keres victory. "Now, it seems, in order to muddy the waters they were trying to prove that Reshevsky might win!" he recalled, adding that Igor Bondarevsky, Keres' second, had given a talk after flying home from The Hague. During the talk Bondarevsky said Botvinnik had just been lucky so far and that Reshevsky had more talent.

Botvinnik measured his response to Zhdanov carefully. "Reshevsky may become world champion," he said. Then he paused. Zhdanov, who had been walking about the room, stopped. "But this would indicate that nowadays there are no strong players in the world," Botvinnik added. Reshevsky was doomed by his addiction to time pressure, he assured them. "Very well, we wish *you* victory," Zhdanov said. It was another bravura

Botvinnik performance. His hosts clearly wanted some kind of guarantee of victory. Botvinnik didn't give them one in so many words. But what he said was enough.

Yet while leading the tournament with a stunning 8–2 score, he suffered an agonizing loss — to Reshevsky. "My nerves let me down," he said. In mutual time pressure, he missed a saving resource at move 34 and lost. "The fair-minded crowd gave the American a great ovation," said Yuri Averbakh. But Apollonov's face "was as black as thunder," he said.

Then came a win as Black over Keres in 72 moves. Draws with Euwe and Smyslov set the stage for his fourth game — and third straight time-pressure battle — with Reshevsky *(diagram)*.



Reshevsky–Botvinnik, World Championship, Moscow 1948
After 38. g3

With 38. ... Rf6 Black would protect his only weakness, the e6-pawn, and prepare to realize his one-pawn advantage with ... Nd6–f5.

38. ... Rcf7? 39. Nf4?

"Of course, White loses quickly this way but in case of 39. Ne5 N×e5 40. R×e5 he cannot count on salvation," Botvinnik wrote. Khalifman said this line, which prepares Qe1 counterplay, is unclear.

39. ... R×f4! 40. g×f4 R×f4

"In this game I gave my word to myself not to fall into time trouble and I 'nearly' kept the promise," Botvinnik wrote. "To economize time in time pressure I wrote down only my moves. But Reshevsky, being in a difficult position, tried as always to exploit his opponent's time pressure: He made moves instantly. Finally I made my 40th move" — the end of the time control — "and Reshevsky immediately made his 41st move."

A Soviet publicity photograph of Botvinnik, issued about the time he won the 1948 world championship match-tournament.

Could it be that Reshevsky wasn't sure of how many moves he had made? No, Botvinnik felt, Reshevsky was trying to force him to play quickly. Botvinnik had two minutes left. He rechecked his score-sheet and "made a 'heroic' decision — to wait until my flag fell," he said. When it did, he turned to the chief arbiter, Milan Vidmar, and asked, "Were 40 moves made?" "Yes, 40 moves were made," he replied.

"And the face of Reshevsky, which up to this moment kept an expression of hope — and in the depth of his soul supposed that even after the flag's fall I would continue to hurry — turned into indignation," Botvinnik wrote. Reshevsky protested that Botvinnik's question was improper. But Botvinnik said that since it happened after his flag fell, he had a right to ask. The protest was rejected and the game ended with:

41. Qb1 Rf5!

Time pressure is over and there is no defense to ... g3 or … Nd2–e4.

42. Qd3 g3 43. Qf1 g×f2+ 44. K×f2 Rg5! 45. Qh3 Rg2+ 46. K×f3 Nd2+ 47. Ke3 Rg3+ 0–1

Viktor Malkin, a Botvinnik friend, recalled how he stuck to his personal timetable each day as he walked to the House of Unions playing site. "Two or three times I 'lay in wait' for him near the Sretensky Gates and looked at the large clock which was there. Botvinnik appeared exactly at 15 minutes before the beginning of play. He walked with an elastic and very quick step and always without a companion. He was in deep concentration and the entire walk served his peculiar preparation, his entry to playing condition." Malkin attended every round, thanks to his friend Yakov Estrin, 25, who operated one of the wall boards and had access to tickets. "Everyone rooted for Botvinnik, it was an expression of patriotism," Malkin said.

They got their wish on May 9, Victory Day. As White in an Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, Botvinnik played 14. b4 and offered a draw to Euwe. "I had no doubt he would accept the offer," he wrote, considering the Dutchman's last-place position. "To my surprise, Euwe unexpectedly said he wanted to play further," Botvinnik said. "I got angry" and said, "Very well, we will play on." Euwe, subtly sensing "the change in circumstances, extended his hand to me and congratulated me on victory in the tournament."

Vidmar began to announce: "The outcome of the game Botvinnik–Euwe guarantees the Soviet grandmaster first place in the match-tournament. And the title of world chess champion...." But his remaining words were drowned out by an ovation. Floodlights flashed and photographers rushed to capture the moment as Botvinnik was congratulated by FIDE president Alexander Rueb and was presented with a flower bouquet by Vidmar's daughter. A Soviet movie cameraman tried to record the historic scene but was too late. Botvinnik left quickly because he had been invited to celebrate at the home of Dmitry Zhimerin, the electric power plant commissar. But this posed a propaganda problem.

The organizers *had* to show the broader public how Botvinnik played the historic move. So Estrin, who wore the same color suit as Botvinnik, posed as him. It was Estrin's hand that was captured on film moving 14. b4 on the board. The b-pawn was later given

to Soviet women's player Elizaveta Bykova, who wanted it as her talisman "in certainty that this pawn would make her women's world champion," Botvinnik wrote. "And in fact this happened!"

But the tournament wasn't over. When Botvinnik faced Reshevsky for the fifth and final time he made a clever choice of opening.

World Championship, Moscow 1948
Botvinnik–Samuel Reshevsky
C49 Four Knights Game

1. e4! e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bb5 Bb4 5. 0–0 0–0 6. d3 B×c3 7. b×c3 d6 8. Bg5

White's fourth move invited 4. ... Nd4 5. N×d4 e×d4 6. e5 and a quick handshake. When that was rejected, Botvinnik passed up the equally drawish 8. B×c6. What was he playing for? To inflict psychological damage on a possible future challenger? Or to help Smyslov edge Reshevsky out of second-prize money?

8. ... Qe7 9. Re1 Nd8 10. d4 Ne6 11. Bc1 Rd8 12. Bf1 Nf8 13. Nh4 Ng4 14. g3

The Bf1 and g2–g3 idea as well Ragozin's idea, 11. ... Rd8, were familiar.

14. ... Qf6 15. f3 Nh6 16. Be3 Re8 17. Qd2 Ng6 18. Ng2

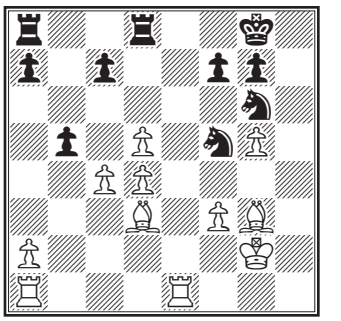
Not 18. Bg5? N×h4! 19. B×f6? N×f3+. Now 18. ... Q×f3? 19. Be2 Q×e4 20. B×f6 g×h6 21. Bb5 and 19. ... Qf6 20. Bc4 and 21. Rf1 or 21. B×h6 favors White.

18. ... Bh3 19. Be2 B×g2 20. K×g2 d5!? 21. e×d5 e×d4 22. c×d4 Nf5 23. Bf2 Red8 24. c4 h5

For once Reshevsky had more time, 25 minutes to Botvinnik's 10, to reach move 40. His sacrifice should be enough to draw but no more.

25. h4 b5! 26. Qg5! Q×g5 27. h×g5 h4 28. Bd3 h×g3 29. B×g3 *(diagram)*

Reshevsky again tried to blitz Botvinnik, by moving almost instantly so that the Russian couldn't think on the American's time. "A dubious method," Botvinnik wrote. Reshevsky still had nearly 25 minutes compared to Botvinnik's two or three and should have taken time to evaluate 29. ... N×g3 30. K×g3 b×c4 31. B×c4 Rab8, which offered chances.



After 29. B×g3

29. ... N×d4? 30. Rad1! c5

Otherwise 31. B×g6 wins a knight.

31. d×c6 N×c6 32. Be4! Rac8 33. R×d8+ N×d8 34. Bf5!

Black can resign (34. ... R×c4 35. Re8+).

34. ... Ra8 35. Re8+ Kh7 36. c×b5 f6 37. Bc7 Ne6 38. R×a8 N×c7 39. R×a7 N×b5 40. Rd7 f×g5 41. a4 1–0

Smyslov did manage to finish second. On the final day Botvinnik lost badly to Keres, prompting suspicions that this was the way Keres could have played earlier if allowed. But Reuben Fine hinted that the only suspicious Botvinnik–Keres game was the final one, because it enabled Keres to tie Reshevsky for third place. (In the game Botvinnik offered two early draws and Keres responded to the second with a crude curse. "Possibly that wasn't too classy on my part," he said many years later.)

The Keres Question

Was Keres coerced? That question has been raised for decades. The answer from, among others, Keres' wife and his confidante Valter Heuer, is no. But Dutch journalist Max Pam lent credence to the claim when he published an interview with Botvinnik in 1991 in a Dutch magazine. Botvinnik said that when the tournament moved to Moscow "something unpleasant happened. At a very high level, it was proposed that the other Soviet players would lose to me on purpose. He added with emphasis, "It was Stalin personally who proposed this." However, he added, "Of course I refused! It was an intrigue against me, to belittle me. A ridiculous proposal, made only to put down the future world champion."

Botvinnik may have overestimated Stalin's involvement in chess in the past. But Smyslov believed the "great leader" had a hand in this intrigue. Smyslov recalled that Botvinnik was angry over "the distrust in his chess strength" and dared to snub Stalin at the tournament's finish. "Mikhail Moiseyevich was so upset with the *Vozhd* that he even 'forgot' to say the usual regards in his honor at the closing ceremony," he said. "And the authorities 'forgot' to reward him with the Order of Lenin, which Botvinnik received only 10 years later, simultaneously with me." Smyslov added that Botvinnik needed no help to win the tournament because he "played so powerfully and confidently."

Nevertheless, conspiracy theorists had in the Pam interview what they considered a smoking gun. But by the time the alleged Stalin proposal was made, Keres had already lost badly twice to Botvinnik. He actually played a bit better in his two losses *after* the supposed coercion. And when Bent Larsen was asked in 1990 why Keres failed in his championship aspirations he replied: "Keres and I once discussed this question but only briefly. He said that when Tal drew a terribly lost position against Smyslov in the 1959 Candidates tournament, he knew that fate was against him. 'You cannot fight against such luck,' he said. Yet I don't think that Keres was world championship material — that is, a logical contender for the crown."

Three Years Unnoticed

Botvinnik played no serious chess for nearly three years. This prompted reports that he had suffered a nervous breakdown. But it was Gayane who apparently experienced some

emotional trauma. Botvinnik's sole comment, in *Achieving the Aim,* was "My wife had fallen ill after the 1948 match-tournament, not being able to get over all the stress and strain."

Botvinnik continued to prepare for his doctoral dissertation. "In the Soviet Union this means much," wrote Gligorić. "Not only the reputation but the salary and fees, legally fixed, are much greater."

Botvinnik's games continued to be printed in Soviet magazines but his absence from competition was noticed by his rivals. David Bronstein later recalled how when Bobby Fischer dropped out of chess following his own world championship win in 1972, Botvinnik said without embarrassment, "What kind of champion do we have? For two years he doesn't play a single game." Bronstein added, "It was funny."

Bronstein's animosity toward Botvinnik was still evident in 2003 when he suggested that his rival hid behind his two professions. "Botvinnik loved to emphasize that he wasn't a player, he's a scientist, he seriously studies power engineering and in general he's not up to chess — he had to defend his dissertation." But, Bronstein said, in the 1950s he mentioned the champion to "an elderly professor of electrical engineering," who reacted angrily, "Don't mention that name to me!" "And I understood what it was about. Among the scientists, Botvinnik prided himself as a great chessplayer and among chessplayers he prided himself as a great scientist," Bronstein said. He said he was "not sure" Botvinnik was really a major specialist in his field. His comments, which appeared in *64,* triggered a rebuttal in the magazine three months later, titled "Botvinnik: He was a Major Scientist." Yu. Shakarian, a member of the Academy of Electro-technical Science, said he had worked with Botvinnik since 1957 at the All-Union Science Research Institute of Electric Energy and could testify to his scientific contributions. In the 1950s there were problems in transferring power from Volga hydroelectric sources. Botvinnik solved the problem, and his solution, "Strong Regulation," was adopted widely "in the USSR and later in the whole world," he said.

Bronstein never seemed to appreciate how much Botvinnik's career meant to him. The Soviet Union *was* being electrified on a vast scale. This was evidence to him that the goals of Technocratic Communism were being fulfilled. Botvinnik was not a robotic follower of the Party line who believed that life in the Soviet was better than in the West. How could he? He had visited Britain and the Netherlands on four trips. Very few non-government Soviet citizens had spent as much time in Western Europe. But he believed, as Marxism professed, that history was on the side of the USSR.

The Future of the World Championship

Botvinnik's thoughts about the future of the championship appeared on page 3 of the January 1949 issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR* under the title "My Suggestions for Conducting the World Championship Competition." It went far beyond his previous comments and stretched to 17 proposals. Most had been previously or were subsequently adopted by FIDE and remained in effect for decades. These included holding a championship match

Botvinnik's celebrity status as world champion was often used for propaganda purposes. Here, with Salo Flor (extreme left), he is shown (second from right) attending a plenum of the Russian Republic chess section, with plenum members, on the cover of the *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (Chess in the USSR) issue of January 1949.

every third year, the match being a best-of-24-games affair, the champion retaining his title in case of a tie, a time control of 40 moves in two and a half hours, adjournment followed by a 16 moves in one hour time control, a schedule of three match games a week, and an allowance for a player to postpone three games due to illness if certified by "an official doctor."

Other proposals were approved by FIDE in modified form. Botvinnik wanted a candidates tournament to be limited to six players who each played about 20 games. He said each player in a world championship match could have one second. Other Botvinnik proposals were never accepted, such as his idea that if a former world champion ties for first in a candidates tournament, the tie would be broken in his favor.

His point number five is revealing: He visualized a situation in which the champion and his challenger could not agree on the terms of their match. Then the match would be replaced by a four-player tournament consisting of the champion, the challenger and the next two highest finishers in the candidates tournament. Since neither the champion nor challenger would want that to happen, this was Botvinnik's way of forcing them to agree.

Botvinnik had another, somewhat less impressive but no less daunting project: to design and build his own *dacha* with logs. He and Yakov Rokhlin went on what he called "a reconnaissance trip" on May 2, 1949, to Nikolina Gora. This was the elite colony on the north bank of the Moscow River, west of the capital, where artists, writers and scientists had choice plots. Botvinnik had spent time at a rest home there while preparing with Ragozin for the Soviet Championship in 1945. The area seemed ideal.

But when Botvinnik tried to acquire a plot of land he encountered a problem: Nikolina Gora's location was considered to be of strategic value and approval was needed from Lavrentia Beria, who had been promoted to be Stalin's deputy premier. Botvinnik asked Apollonov to support him, using the latter's connections to the security "organs." A short time later Apollonov directed Dmitry Postnikov to meet Botvinnik at the Sports Committee office and tell him that Beria had refused permission. When Postnikov, later the head of the Soviet chess federation, broke the news, Botvinnik had prepared himself for another performance.

He went to an office telephone and dialed a number. Postnikov heard someone pick up at the other end and say, "Malenkov's telephone. With whom am I speaking?" "Hello, Georgy Maksimilanovich! World champion Botvinnik is speaking," he replied. He then went on with a "small question to ask." "Where are you calling from?" Malenkov asked. "From the physical culture committee," Botvinnik said. "I will wait for you in 20 minutes at Stadion Square," Malenkov said. "Your request will be ordered."

Within a week, Sports Committee received a telegram detailing the approval of such and such space for Botvinnik at Nikolina Gora, Averbakh said. "But the main thing, of course, was the signature — Stalin." Averbakh concluded, "Botvinnik managed to outplay Beria!"

Botvinnik became friends with his *dacha* neighbors and even played chess with some of them. He dismissed the eminent scientist Pyotr Kapitsa as weak. But he had "great respect" for Sergei Prokofiev, "noting in his games an aggressive style, creativity and a dislike for defense," said Mark Taimanov, who knew both men.

Botvinnik was able to outfit the new home thanks to a new Soviet custom. When players began to be sent abroad, they earned fees for simultaneous exhibitions and lectures but were expected to turn over half the money to the state. They had learned to dodge that by spending the money before they came home. For example, when Keres, on a trip to Switzerland, went to the Soviet embassy and was asked by the ambassador for the government's half share, he replied that he had used the cash to buy a pair of shoes. Which half of his fee did the ambassador want, he asked, "The left or the right one?"

Botvinnik used foreign trips to acquire household conveniences for his *dacha*. This meant central heating equipment, a fuel injector and an ironing board, on which he did his own ironing.

First Challenger

While Botvinnik was concerned with his scientific work and summer home, "three years had gone by unnoticed," as he put it. The FIDE held its first candidates tournament in Budapest in 1950, with a bit of intrigue. Fine, Reshevsky and Euwe were unavailable for various reasons, so there was an odd number of players, 11. To make an even number, FIDE wanted to add Petar Trifunović of Yugoslavia. But Stalin was feuding with Yugoslavia's leader Marshal Tito. So the Soviets "sacrificed" Igor Bondarevsky, who was one of the 11, according to Averbakh. It was announced that Bondarevsky was much too ill to go to Budapest. That reduced the number to 10, so there was no need for Trifunović. Bondarevsky attended a later round as a spectator. "They said you were fatally ill," Miguel Najdorf told him. "But you seem as healthy as a bull." Bondarevsky answered with a "crooked smile," Averbakh said.

Botvinnik with his daughter Olga and wife Gayane at the *dacha* he built at Nikolina Gora, near Moscow.

Budapest 1950 was Isaak Yefremovich Boleslavsky's finest hour. After an apparently pre-

arranged draw with his friend Bronstein, he led Bronstein by one point, with two rounds to go. But Boris Vainshtein, a friend of Boleslavsky, had resurfaced as an aide to Bronstein. At his suggestion, Boleslavsky agreed to make quick draws in the final two rounds. That gave Bronstein a chance to catch him, which he did.

"Boleslavsky was a very good chessplayer but he was not a fighter, and because of this, he had not very good results against Botvinnik," Averbakh explained. "Boleslavsky was afraid he had not much chance to win against Botvinnik." When the tournament ended in a Bronstein-Boleslavsky tie, they and Vainshtein hoped that FIDE would replace the Botvinnik-vs.-challenger world championship match with a three-man match-tournament. "But they miscalculated," Averbakh said. A playoff match was ordered. Bronstein won it and completed a meteoric two-year rise to qualify for the right to challenge Botvinnik in 1951.

The Anti-Botvinnik

Each of Botvinnik's world championship challengers was starkly different from him. David Ionovich Bronstein's father was injured by mustard gas while serving in the Tsar's army in World War I and joined the Ukrainian Communist Party in 1919. He became a flour mill manager but, like Ratmir Kholmov's father, became a victim of the purges. Arrested on New Year's Eve 1937, he was sentenced to seven years in the Gulag, when David was 11. David's mother, who worked a late-night shift, worried how her son was spending his time without the presence of parents. But he had discovered chess and a Pioneer Palace where he could play for hours. "And I'm at peace: My son won't fall under a bad influence and will grow up to be a worthy citizen of the USSR," she said.

At first, Bronstein was a chess Romantic, playing the Evans and King's Gambit, "all the Italian school," he said. His favorite piece was the bishop and he loved combinations. He admitted he had "a thirst for adventure. Incessant. I always reached for complicated, unexplored positions in which on every move there is 'check and mate.' I live to experience the sensation of being close to chess destruction and find a way to salvation," he said. He was the anti–Botvinnik.

As a "son of an enemy of the people" Bronstein could not get into a university to study mathematics, his goal. But fate also gave him nearsightedness. That saved him from the World War II draft. He regarded the rest of his life as a gift "because according to the logic of events he should have been killed in the war," said Tatiana Boleslavskaya, Boleslavsky's daughter. She said he never tried to dispel his reputation "of being an eccentric, an original, a man not from this world. In the country in which he lived, it was better to be seen as an eccentric than suspected of being a heretic."

After Vainshtein brought Bronstein to Moscow he let him live for several years in the Vainshtein home. At the very end of the war, Bronstein's father was released from prison, exhausted and sick. Bronstein managed to bribe a local police chief with 100 pounds of flour to get an internal passport that didn't identify his father as a former political prisoner, according to Boleslavskya. His father was still barred from the capital but David

found a place for his parents to live outside Moscow. His father attended the 1951 world championship match secretly, usually sitting in one of the rows nearest the stage of the playing site, the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall. Bronstein later recalled that during games he saw Viktor Abakumov, head of the NKVD's successor, the MGD, sitting in the loge. "David said that while playing he remembered this all the time," Boleslavskaya said. (Botvinnik said it was the "evil genius" Vainshtein who told Bronstein to falsely claim that he lost the crucial 23rd game because he was thinking of his father.)

Before the championship match Botvinnik played training games with Ragozin at Nikolina Gora, while Bronstein played with Kholmov. Botvinnik also researched Bronstein's playing style. He asked Apollonov for approval to check out foreign chess magazines. (Foreign literature, even chess magazines, was routinely restricted on a need-to-know basis.) "How did you prepare for tournaments earlier? Study literature?" he asked suspiciously. "Of course," Botvinnik said. "Then why can't you study it again?" was the reply of refusal. "I was struck dumb with amazement. Such a wise thought had never entered my head," Botvinnik wrote sarcastically. He concluded that since Apollonov and Bronstein were members of the same sports society, Dinamo (as were many of the secret police elite), they were allied against him. "So I got hold of the magazines without his assistance," he wrote.

Another account of this tension comes from Anatoly Karpov and journalist Yevgeny Gik. They wrote that Apollonov kept Botvinnik waiting to see him for an hour: When the world champion was finally admitted he said he had another appointment elsewhere. "What? You mean you have matters more important than to talk with me?" Apollonov demanded. Botvinnik said he was late for the other appointment — at the Kremlin with Vyacheslav Molotov. He went to that meeting and he explained why he was late: "Comrade Molotov, the chairman of our physical culture committee supposes that nothing is more important than a meeting with him." Later that day Apollonov was fired from his Sports Committee job, said Karpov and Gik. But Averbakh dismissed this as "a fairy tale." Apollonov left to take a high post in the MGD, he said.

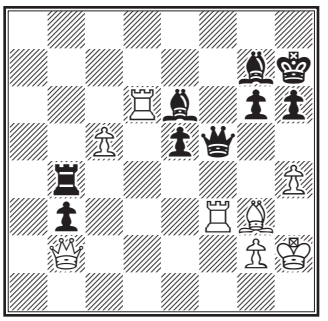
Two Envelopes

Beginning in 1951, Botvinnik adopted a policy of trying to tweak the playing rules before each match. This convinced his opponents that he was trying to gain a psychological edge by winning concessions on some trivial issue. Bronstein recalled how during their negotiations, "Botvinnik said that Alekhine allegedly complained about how young players pestered him during a game with numerous draw offers." He offered a formula: A player wishing to offer a draw must play a move on the board, turn towards empty "space," say "I offer a draw" and hit the clock. Yet everything but the empty "space" was already in the international rules, Bronstein said. This was just Botvinnik's way of asserting his authority.

But Botvinnik had a more substantive — and bizarre — idea. There should be *two* sealed move envelopes. When a player adjourned he would give one to the chief arbiter

and a second to his assistant. This would "prevent any dishonesty should the referee be a partisan of either of the rivals," wrote Gligorić, who added, "What an idea!" But Botvinnik didn't realize that Bronstein "loved to argue," Gligorić added. The debate over the duplicate envelopes lasted a month. Every day brought a fresh comment from Bronstein. Botvinnik became more and more irritated with the verbal battle he had initiated. Finally, Bronstein accepted the rule.

During the war years Botvinnik began a practice of writing notes to himself before each game. They focused his thoughts the way "talking points" help politicians remember what to say. "Make a move when everything is perfectly clear," he wrote before the first game of the 1951 match, a 29-move draw. "Remember who you are dealing with," was another common one, and he wrote it to himself before the second round. He added, "Don't look at him!" *(diagram)*



Bronstein–Botvinnik,
World Championship,
Moscow 1951, second game
After 41. Rf3

Bronstein proved to be a good psychologist. He delayed many of his attacks and sacrifices until after move 30 so they would catch Botvinnik when he was in time trouble. Here he made his 41st move "by inertia, to be on the safe side," he wrote. But it was also good psychology. It gave Botvinnik an extraordinarily difficult task because Black has four tempting candidates for the sealed move.

He can try 41. ... Rf4, based on 42. R×f4?? e×f4, which threatens ... B×b2 as well as ... f×g3+. But that fails to 42. R×b3! B×b3 43. Q×b3 when the passed c-pawn gives White strong winning chances. The second try is 41. ... e4, which attacks the queen and favors Black's b-pawn after 42. Q×g7+? K×g7 43. R×f5 B×f5. But White would get the upper hand with 42. R×f5 B×b2 43. Rf1 and Rb6!. And the third try, 41. ... Qc2, can be met by 42. Rf2 Q×b2 43. R×b2 e4 44. Rb1 Bf5 45. Rb6!. So the game went:

41. ... Qg4! 42. c6 g5!!

The tempting 42. ... e4? would have lost to 43. Rd7! B×d7 44. Rf7!. But after the surprising 42. ... g5!! Black can answer 43. h×g5 with 43. ... e4! 44. Rd7? B×d7 45. Rf7? Qh5+ and wins (although 44. Rf6! h×g5 draws).

43. c7! Rc4 44. R×b3

Bronstein found "the only continuation," Botvinnik wrote. But 44. Q×b3! g×h4 45. Bf4! threatens 46. R×e6 Q×e6 47. Rc3! winning (Khalifman). White has good chances after 45. ... e×f4 46. Qd3+ Qf5 47. R×e6!.

44. ... e4 45. Qf2 g×h4 46. Bf4 R×c7 47. R×e6

"Black has too many bishops," Bronstein wrote.

47. ... Q×e6 48. B×c7 Q×b3 49. Qf5+ Kg8 Draw

At move 47 Botvinnik wrote, "Fearing new surprises, White forces a draw. A wise decision since on 47. Rbb6 Black had prepared 47. ... Rc2! 48. Q×c2 Q×f4+ 49. Kg1 h3!! (preventing 50. Qf2 in view of 50. ... h2+)." His remarkable home analysis ran 50. R×e6 Bd4+ 51. Kh1 h×g2+ 52. Q×g2 Qh4+ 53. Qh2 Qe1+ 54. Kg2 Qe2+ 55. Kh3 Qh5+ 56. Kg3 Qf3+ 57. Kh4 Bf2+ 58. Q×f2 Q×f2+ and draws.

Along with his pregame notes to himself, Botvinnik also jotted down postgame comments. After this game, he wrote: "Played with difficulty and badly. Plenty of blunders. Sheer bungling ... a nightmare," then added, "Analyzed decently."

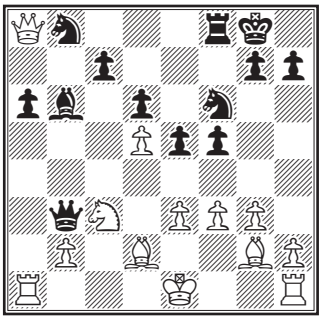
Botvinnik told Gennady Sosonko that he severed relations with Bronstein after the match because "he behaved outrageously." There was a spectator seating box directly opposite the stage that was reserved for the secret police, members of the Dinamo sports society "and all his supporters." Whenever Bronstein sacrificed something or won a pawn "they all applauded," he said. He also accused Bronstein of making a move and quickly going behind the stage. "Then he would suddenly dart out and again disappear," prompting laughter to annoy his opponent, he said.

The Great Adjournment Match

Botvinnik's superiority in the 1930s and 1940s was largely due to opening preparation. His three-year break cost him dearly. True, he could catch up on new ideas that emerged in 1949 and 1950. But Botvinnik would normally have used those years to find new ideas that would keep him ahead of the pack. "He lost his huge advantage," Averbakh said. Without an opening edge, he had to win games in other ways, and the best chance lay in the endgame. The Bronstein match could have been called the Great Adjournment Match because so many games were decided by superior home analysis, clever sealed moves and second-session surprises.

Bronstein took the first full-point when Botvinnik botched an ending in the fifth game. But the challenger made a ghastly blunder on the 57th move of the next game and resigned immediately. Botvinnik took his first lead in a knight endgame of the seventh round. In *Achieving the Aim* he describes an adventure that day when the late March ice on the Moscow River was on the move. Being in Nikolina Gora, he was cut off from the capital. He called Nikolai Romanov, who was back as head of Sports Committee after the departure of Apollonov. Romanov readily agreed not to forfeit him — and even offered to send a small plane for him. But Botvinnik managed to get to the playing site by boat.

In his three-volume game collection, the notes to the ninth were provided by, of all people, his old antagonist Pyotr Romanovsky *(diagram)*.



**Botvinnik–Bronstein,
World Championship,
Moscow 1951, ninth game**
After 19. ... Q×b3

A rook ahead, White can win with the simple 20. 0–0, Romanovsky said, citing 20. ... Q×b2 21. Ra2 Qb3 22. Rb1 Qc4 23. Bf1. Also 21. ... B×e3+ 22. Kh1 Qb6 23. Rb1 Nbd7 24. Q×f8+! and R×b6.

20. R×a6? N×a6 21. Q×a6 N×d5 22. Qa4?

Going into an endgame with a piece for two pawns is not nearly as good as 22. N×d5 Q×d5 23. Ke2! f4 24. Qd3 when Black can resign, Romanovsky said. Also winning was 22. Qe2, he added.

22. ... Q×a4 23. N×a4 B×e3 24. Bf1?

A third error, indicating a lack of confidence in 24. Nc3! B×d2+ 25. K×d2. Gligorić wrote of the match, "Dr. Botvinnik played with much less assurance than Mr. Botvinnik."

24. ... Ra8! 25. b3 B×d2+ 26. K×d2 Kf8 27. Bd3 g6 28. Rc1 Rb8 29. Nc3 Nb4

After Botvinnik's 41st move his winning chances were slim. Botvinnik said Bronstein, who should have sealed, ignored the arbiter and made his move on the board, in an effort to force Botvinnik to seal. "His calculation was clear: Botvinnik, lacking practice, and tired after five hours' play, would take a long time over the sealed move, and would probably seal a bad one," Botvinnik wrote. When the arbiter, Karel Opočenský, said that Bronstein's "open" move had to be regarded as sealed, Dinamo members shouted "Shame!" at Botvinnik. But the order stood. Nevertheless, Bronstein managed to draw the game. "A psychologically interesting game!" was Romanovsky's conclusion. "Played abominably" was Botvinnik's. "By chance he fell into a trap — after which I played like an imbecile."

More disappointment followed in the tenth game when, thanks to "one of the most unsuccessful analyses in my practice," he failed to find an elegant winning zugzwang. (He also missed a win at move 29, as pointed out on www.truechess.com.)

He was punished for this by being badly outplayed in the 11th game. The match was tied. But not for long. Botvinnik won perhaps his best game — or Bronstein's worst — of the match two days later.

World Championship, Moscow 1951, 12th game
David Bronstein–Botvinnik
A84 Dutch Defense

1. d4 e6 2. c4 f5 3. e3!? Nf6 4. Nc3 d5 5. Nh3 c6 6. Bd2 Bd6 7. Qc2 0–0 8. 0–0–0 Qe7 9. f3

"Consistent and ... weak," Bronstein wrote. He didn't like 9. Nf4 g5 but later concluded 10. Nh3 leaves Black a bit over-extended. He said he "simply overlooked" Black's next move.

9. ... d×c4!

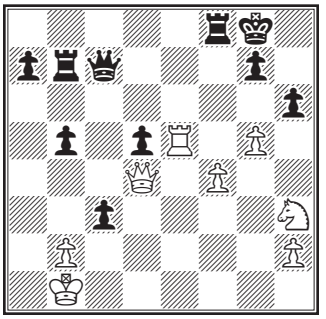
"Black's task is not easy! I decided to exchange on c4 in order to then carry out the advance ... e5, which was possible because of the position of the knight on h3," Botvinnik wrote. For example, 11. B×c4 b5 12. Be2 e5.

10. e4 f×e4 11. N×e4? b5! 12. N×d6 Q×d6 13. f4?

The game was decided with these moves. Bronstein rejected the natural 11. f×e4 because of 11. ... e5, which he incorrectly regarded as worse for him than the game. Then he made his bishop bad with 13. f4, hoping for 13. ... Q×d4? 14. Bb4 Qe3+ 15. Kb1 Re8 16. Re1 Qb6 17. Ng5 with some play.

Botvinnik's former match opponent Grigory Levenfish had wanted to warn Bronstein: "Botvinnik is more of a tactician than a strategist. Play quietly, then it's possible to achieve success." He told this to Viktor Malkin "knowing of my good relations with Bronstein," Malkin recalled. "Alas, I never decided to pass on his words. And when I told him after the match, David was even angry."

13. ... Na6 14. Be2 c5! 15. Bf3 Rb8 16. Bc3 Nb4! 17. d×c5 N×a2+ 18. Kb1 N×c3+ 19. Q×c3 Q×c5 20. Rhe1 h6 21. Re5 Qc7 22. g4 Bb7 23. B×b7 R×b7 24. g5



After 26. ... c3

Botvinnik pointed out that 24. R×e6 N×g4 25. Rg6 could be met by 25. ... Qf7! (26. R×g4 Qf5+). Instead, Bronstein prepared an Exchange sacrifice based on "the last hope — mutual time pressure," as Botvinnik put it.

24. ... Nd5 25. Rd×d5!? e×d5 26. Qd4 c3! *(diagram)*

It's over (27. b×c3 Qc4! or 27. Q×d5+ Qf7).

27. b3 Qd7 28. Nf2 c2+ 29. Kc1 h×g5 30. R×g5 Qe6 31. Re5 Qd6! 32. K×c2 Rc7+ 33. Kd2 Qc5 34. Q×c5 R×c5 35. Nd3 Rc6 36. R×d5 a6 37. h4 Rh6 38. h5 Rhf6 39. b4 Rf5 40. Rd6 R8f6 41. Rd8+ and 0–1

Before the match Botvinnik made a canny assessment of his opponent. Bronstein was a "master of landing decisive combinative blows. Calculates like Reshevsky (two to three moves ahead) with staggering accuracy." But unlike Reshevsky who "is not able to

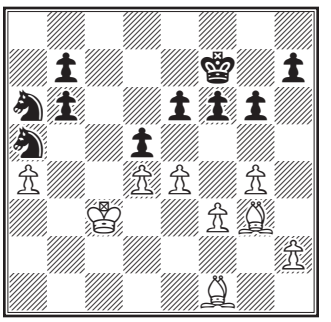
attack the king," this is Bronstein's "strength." He added that the challenger was a "good professional" who does not hurry in endgames, does not give his opponent counterchances and "is able to offer a draw (in an inferior position!)."

Bronstein remained optimistic to the end. One day Mikhail Beilin, a lawyer and master who later became an editor of *64*, encountered him while walking on Tversky Boulevard, one of Moscow's greatest thoroughfares. Beilin allowed himself to point out that all the previous world champions had gone to college. "There hasn't been a champion without higher education," he said. "Well, so what?" Bronstein replied. "There hasn't been but there will be." He had reason to be confident. Botvinnik's "strength was giving out," the champion admitted later. On two of the free days he even slept during the hours that he normally played. That violated one of his regimen rules, designed to keep his body clock attuned to the playing schedule.

The match was tied five times, a championship record. Botvinnik made it 10–9 after outplaying Bronstein in another drawable adjournment. A draw the next day meant that Bronstein needed three points in the remaining four scheduled games to become champion.

The 21st game wasn't held until May 4 because of a three-day break for May Day celebrations. On May 3 Bronstein got caught in a Moscow downpour and went into the celebrated Aragvi restaurant to dry off. He found friends there and they began to drink, he recalled to Sergei Voronkov. "It began as usual, with medicinal doses but ended with a full program," he said. Remarkably, this had no ill effects: he won the next two games, finishing off the 22nd with a queen sacrifice that sent his fans in the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall into a rapture. "If I have regrets it's only that there wasn't a downpour before the 24th game," Bronstein said.

The 24th was crucial because of what happened in the 23rd. Botvinnik had concluded that his opponent had two key deficiencies. One was a lack of "a proper sense of danger." The other was "a clear weakness in endgame play." Both were exposed in the 23rd game. Needing one point out of two games to become champion, Bronstein decided to play for a knockout win. On the 35th move he gave up a bishop for a knight to win a pawn. Botvinnik said applause broke out in the hall — from Bronstein's fans, who cheered him whenever he won or sacrificed something. "On this occasion my opponent realized from my joyful face that he had gone wrong," he wrote. (Bronstein called the capture "the worst mistake of the entire match." But recent analysis suggests it wasn't bad after all.) Four moves later *(diagram)*:



Botvinnik–Bronstein, World Championship, Moscow 1951, 23rd game
After 39. e4

"I have no desire to analyze this tragic endgame," Bronstein wrote 25 years later. But he added "I believe that even now the position is a draw." He was right. Alexander Khalifman said 39. ... d×e4 40. f×e4 e5! 41. d×e5 Nc5 would draw. Bronstein had ample time, ten minutes to reach move 40.

39. ... f5?

"To this day I cannot understand what I expected of this move," Bronstein wrote. "It is clearly pointless to open up the bishops."

40. g×f5 g×f5 41. Bd3 Kg6

Here Botvinnik thought for 20 minutes over the most important sealed move of his life. But he was discouraged. As he left the stage he confided to Grisha Goldberg, "All is lost." To win, Botvinnik concluded, he had to put one bishop on d6, the other on b1, and trade pawns on d5. Then after Ba2, the d-pawn would fall. But which bishop move comes first? Black seemed to have a defense against either one.

Bronstein analyzed 42. Bb1, the move that virtually all the press room masters believed had been sealed. But Boris Vainshtein stayed all night with him in his room at the Peking Hotel and got him to pay attention to the alternative, 42. Bd6. That should have won the match. Bronstein found a draw after 42. Bd6 Nc6 43. Bb1 Na7! and then 44. e×d5 e×d5 45. Ba2 b5!. Botvinnik, meanwhile, came to the conclusion that even after 43. ... Kf6 in that line "White cannot strengthen his position."

In contrast, 42. Bb1! would have been a winning move, as Salo Flohr quickly realized. Botvinnik's 1933 match opponent was now one of his biggest supporters and he spent the night analyzing 42. Bb1 The next morning he tried to show Botvinnik the decisive lines.

"You know, I'm rather tired, Salmonchik," he said. "I need rest. You show the variations to Ganochka." *To Ganochka?* That made no sense. Flohr didn't realize what had happened until he and Botvinnik were walking to the playing hall. Then Botvinnik revealed, "I sealed a different move." Flohr realized that his hours had been wasted. Botvinnik didn't want to see his 42. Bb1 analysis because it might reveal that he had sealed the other move. He simply didn't trust Flohr. Flohr, 42, burst into tears.

42. Bd6?

When Bronstein saw this surprise move on the board he became "astounded," "depressed," and confused, all at the same time, he said. Even though it was a blunder *that he knew how to refute,* he was hypnotized by "Botvinnik's skill in choosing a sealed move (that) bordered on the magical."

42. ... Nc6 43. Bb1 Kf6?

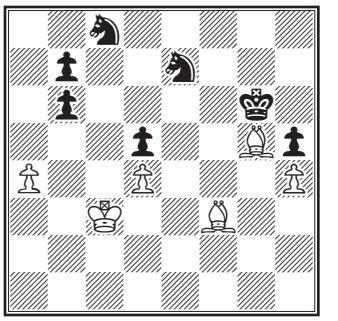
"I remember someone's advice to 'stop playing with the knights, and bring up the king,'" Bronstein wrote, so he abandoned 43. ... Na7!. The king move would have worked against any winning attempt — except for the one that Botvinnik had found at 8 A.M. (Botvinnik had long since abandoned his rule against losing sleep over a game.)

44. Bg3!! f×e4

A key point is that 44. ... Nab4 allows 45. Be5+! Kg6 46. Bd6 Na6. That would repeat the position that occurred after 42. Bd6 but with White to move. The extra tempo would allow White to carry out the winning plan, 47. e×d5 e×d5 48. Ba2!. Botvinnik said that when he saw wins like this at home he had to break off his analysis — because he suddenly had heart palpitations.

45. f×e4 h6 46. Bf4 h5 47. e×d5 e×d5 48. h4! Nab8 49. Bg5+ Kf7 50. Bf5! Na7

"Realizing I had been wrong not to play 43. ... Na7, I felt distressed for the last time in the match, and completely lost heart," Bronstein wrote. But Botvinnik's analysis, confirmed by Khalifman, concluded that no matter what Black did, there was no defense after move 43. For example, on 50. ... Ne7 White wins with 51. Bh3 Nbc6 52. Bg2 Kg7 and now 53. B×e7 N×e7 54. Kb4 Nc6+ 55. Kb5 N×d4+ 56. K×b6.



After 57. Bg5

51. Bf4 Nbc6 52. Bd3 Nc8 53. Be2 Kg6 54. Bd3+ Kf6 55. Be2 Kg6 56. Bf3! N6e7? 57. Bg5! *(diagram)*

Bronstein thought for 45 minutes and then, surprisingly, resigned. He later cursed himself for giving up in "an almost drawn position" and not forcing Botvinnik to prove he had a win.

He conceded that 57. ... Nc6 58. B×d5 Nd6 59. Bf3 Kf5 60. Bc1! b5 61. B×c6! b×c6 62. a5 is lost. "But all this would have had to be found at the board." Botvinnik, however, was certain he would.

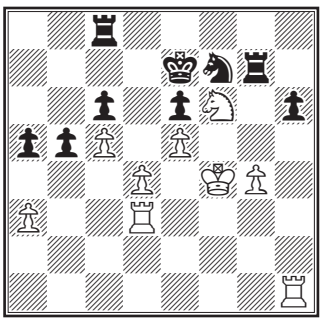
The match was tied once again. Botvinnik was "a complete bundle of nerves" before the final game, which he wanted to play in a private room away from the public. But the game was an anticlimax. Botvinnik adopted his variation (1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Nf3 e6 5. Bg5 d×c4) but Bronstein evaded the complications with 6. a4, allowed simplification and was worse on the 22nd move when he offered a draw. The match ended 12–12 and under FIDE rules, Botvinnik retained his title.

"I know how it hurt, even wounded Devik," said Tatiana Boleslavskaya, who later married him. But, she added, "the essence of it is that Devik didn't want to be world champion!" At least by drawing the match he had proven that he was Botvinnik's equal. In later years, she said, he cherished a copy of a letter he got from Max Euwe. It began "Dear Grandmaster and Co-champion."

10. "But They Were Good Years"

Mikhail Botvinnik was world champion for 13 years. "But he was the strongest for only about all of one year," Boris Spassky said. Yet Botvinnik managed to keep his title, the same one that Spassky lost quickly. He credited his longevity to being able to learn from his lost matches. But his self-sacrifice cannot be underestimated. Botvinnik liked to say that a world championship match takes a year off a player's life. "But," as he said of his championship tenure, "they were good years."

He continued to juggle two careers. On June 28, 1951, exactly 14 years since he defended his first dissertation, he defended his doctoral dissertation and passed with the "yes" votes of 14 of the 19 examiners. Five months later he returned to public chess to play in his first Soviet Championship in six years. Botvinnik started strongly with four wins and two draws, including an impressive time scramble to defeat David Bronstein. His most striking game came in the sixth round *(diagram)*.



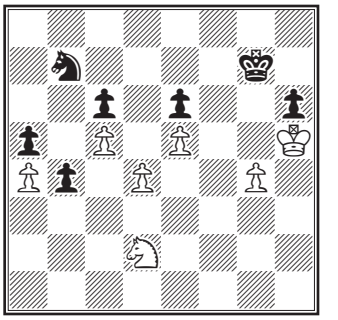
Botvinnik–Nikolai Novotelnov,
19th Soviet Championship,
Moscow 1951
After 42. ... h6

White's impressive knight at f6 confers an advantage. But how can he make progress?

43. a4! b4

White needed a second weakness to attack — in addition to the pawn at h6 — and would have gotten one at a5 after 43. ... b×a4 44. Ra1 and R×a4. Also bad is 43. ... Rd8 44. a×b5 c×b5 45. d5! e×d5 46. N×d5+ in view of 46. ... Ke6 47. Nc7+ Ke7 48. R×d8 K×d8? 49. Ne6+. But 43. a4 gave Black a protected passed pawn at b4. It must have taken considerable home analysis to be sure that Black's a5-pawn, which can now be attacked by a knight on c4, was more important.

Botvinnik took his time to trade the rooks. Thirty-four moves later *(diagram)*:



After 77. Kh5

If Black defends with 77. ... Kh7 78. Nb3 Kg7 (or 77. ... Nd8 78. Nb3 Nb7), White wins with 79. g5! h×g5 80. K×g5, since Black is in zugzwang. For example, 80. ... Kf7 81. Kh6 Ke8 82. Kg6! Ke7 83. Kg7 Ke8 84. Kf6 Kd7 85. Nd2! Nd8 86. Nc4 b3 87. Kg5. After his king wins the b3-pawn, White can make a decisive knight sacrifice on a5. Black avoided that with:

77. ... b3!? 78. N×b3 Kh7

Now on 79. g5 h×g5 80. K×g5 Kg7 Black has the opposition, e.g. 81. Nd2 Nd8 82. Nc4 Nb7.

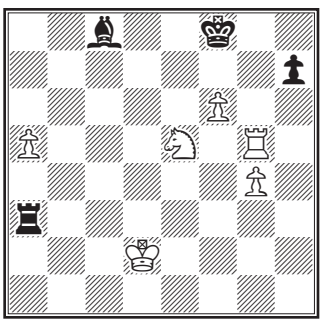
79. d5!! e×d5 80. e6 Kg7 81. e7 Kf7 82. K×h6 K×e7 83. g5 Nd8 84. g6 Ne6 85. N×a5 d4 86. N×c6+ Kd7 87. Ne5+ 1–0

But after that game the 19th Soviet Championship was "not sugar," as the Russians say. Botvinnik was badly outplayed by Vasily Smyslov in the next round, then missed endgame wins against Vladimir Simagin, one of the "wall board boys" of the 1944 championship, and Tigran Petrosian, 22. He also had to swindle Paul Keres into a draw in a piece-down endgame. He suffered two more losses in pretty games, to Yefim Geller in their first-ever meeting and to fellow scientist Nikolai Kopylov.

After accomplishing the improbable at the end of the Bronstein match, Botvinnik didn't try to achieve the impossible. With two rounds to go he had no chance for a top prize. So he drew his final games in 21 and 16 moves. That was enough for clear fifth place, above Bronstein but two points behind tournament winner Keres.

Botvinnik devoted only three sentences to this tournament and to his next, a Géza Maróczy Memorial in Budapest, in his memoirs. "There were a number of interesting games but from a practical point of view my sporting form left a lot to be desired," he summed up. Budapest 1952 was marked by another loss to Geller and a losing blunder on the 39th move against an obscure amateur, Dr. József Szily. But Botvinnik also demonstrated his mastery of endgame theory *(diagram)*:

White threatens 52. f7 and 53. Rg8+. Spectators waited to see the world champion



László Szabó–Botvinnik, Maróczy Memorial, Budapest 1952
After 51. Rg5

resign after, say, 51. ... Be6 52. f7 B×f7 53. Rf5 or 52. ... Ke7 53. Rg8 B×f7 54. Rg7 Kf6 55. R×f7 K×e5 56. R×h7 R×a5?? 57. Rh5+.

51. ... R×a5!! 52. Nd7+ B×d7 53. R×a5 B×g4 54. Ke3 Be6 55. Kf4 Bc4 56. Ra7 h5

Botvinnik said the R+f6-pawn-vs.-B ending — without the irrelevant h-pawn — "had been published in many books." But hardly anyone paid attention to it since Ercole del Rio analyzed it in the 18th century. "White wanted to test the conclusions of theory," Botvinnik dryly wrote.

57. Kg5 h4 58. K×h4 Bb3 59. Kg5 Bc4 60. Rc7 Ba2!

But there were traps to fall into, such as 60. ... Bb5? 61. f7! Kg7 (else 62. Kf6) 62. Kf5 Ba4 63. Rb7! (to stop ... Bb3 and allow Ke6–e7) Bc6 64. Ke6! B×b7 65. Ke7 and wins. Or 63. ... Bd1 64. Ke6 Bh5 65. Rc7! Bg6 66. f8(Q)+! K×f8 67. Kf6 Bh5 68. Rc8+ Be8 69. Ra8.

61. Rc1 Bd5 62. Kf5 Kf7 63. Ke5 Bb3 64. Rc7+ Kf8 65. Rb7

Black can draw if he reaches a pawnless position with his king on h8 and bishop on g8. For example, 65. f7 Kg7! 66. f8(Q)+ K×f8 67. Kf6 Kg8! and ... Kh8 draws. (But not 65. ... B×f7 66. Kf6.) White has been trying to use zugzwang or force to nudge the bishop off the critical a2–g8 diagonal. "But the board turns out to be too large!" Botvinnik wrote. Exactly.

65. ... Bc4 66. Rb4 Ba2 67. Kf5 Bd5!

Black dodges another trap, 67. ... Kf7? 68. Rb7+ Kf8 69. Kg6, when there is no saving check at b1. Szabó conceded the draw at move 78.

Another aspect of Botvinnik's love of endgames was revealed after his 11th round game.

Maróczy Memorial, Budapest 1952
Octav Troianescu–Botvinnik
D94 Grünfeld Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5 4. e3 Bg7 5. Nf3 0–0 6. b4 c6 7. Qb3?!

Black now finds a way to exploit the undefended White rook at a1.

7. ... d×c4 8. B×c4 b5! 9. Be2 a5

The point is 10. a3 a×b4 11. a×b4?? R×a1. Since Black would be better after 10. b×a5 Q×a5 11. Bd2 b4 12. Nd1 c5! 13. d×c5 Na6 White must lose more time.

10. 0–0 Be6 11. Qb1 a×b4 12. Q×b4 Na6 13. Qb2 b4!

So that 14. B×a6 b×c3! 15. Qe2 Bg4! 16. Bc4 c5, with an initiative.

14. Na4 Qa5 15. Qc2

Botvinnik suggested sacrificing a pawn, 15. B×a6 Q×a4 16. Bd3 B×a2, was promising. That looks good after 17. Nd2, which threatens Bc2 or Bc4 (17. ... b3 18. Bc4). But 16. ... c5! is stronger.

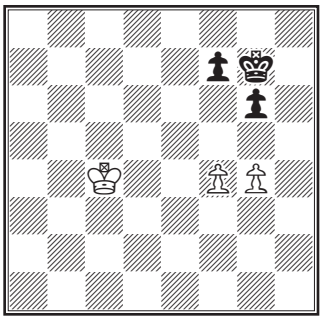
15. ... Bf5 16. Qb3 Ne4 17. Bb2 Nc7 18. Bd1 Nb5 19. Bc2 Nbd6!

Neat play by the knights, which set up a threat of 20. ... Be6 21. Qd3 Bc4.

20. Rfc1 Be6 21. Qd3 c5! 22. d×c5 N×c5 23. N×c5 Bc4! 0–1

Black threatened the queen as well as ... B×b2. White resigned because he believed 24. B×g7 was hopeless in view of 24. ... B×d3 25. B×f8 B×c2 26. B×e7! Q×c5 27. Nd4 b3! 28. N×b3 Qb6! 29. B×d6 B×b3. That's true after 30. Bc5 Qa6! 31. a×b3 Q×a1. But the post-mortem showed that White is not clearly lost after 30. a×b3! R×a1 31. R×a1 Q×d6 32. g3 because Black lacks a passed pawn. To win then, Black must find a way to sacrifice his queen for the rook and reach a won pawn-endgame.

Botvinnik worked out a 15-move variation that leads to the pawn ending and turned it into a study he had published later that year in *Shakhmaty v SSSR.* Why waste good analysis *(diagram)*?



White to play and win

After 1. Kd5! we're at the end of the 15-move line. Black loses after 1. ... Kh6 2. Ke5 Kg7 3. Kd6 Kf8 4. Kd7 Kg7 5. Ke8 Kg8 6. Ke7 Kg7 7. f5! g5 8. Ke8. Better is 1. ... Kf8! 2. Kd6 Ke8 3. f5 g5 because Black can survive without the g-pawn, e.g. 4. f6 Kd8! 5. Ke5 Kd7 6. Kf5 Kd6 7. K×g5 Ke6 and draws. However, White can win by going in the back door, 4. Kc7! (instead of 4. f6) and then 4. ... Ke7 5. Kc8! Kd6 (5. ... Ke8 6. f6!) 6. Kd8 Ke5 7. Ke7 f6 8. Kf7 Kf4 9. K×f6 K×g4 10. Kg6.

Voronovo

Botvinnik finished in a creditable tie for third place at Budapest, behind Keres and Geller. His next scheduled appearance was to be at the Olympiad in Finland in August. The Soviets had avoided the previous Olympiad, at Dubrovnik in 1952, because of the Stalin–Tito feud. "At the time we had terrible relations with Yugoslavia," was Bronstein's explanation. Botvinnik didn't even visit Yugoslavia, one of the premier chess nations, until 1969.

Helsinki 1952 was to be the USSR's debut in the world's most prestigious team chess tournament, just as the summer Olympics in Helsinki was the first time Soviet athletes took part in the International Olympic Committee's games. Botvinnik claimed he "was doubtful whether I should take part or not" because of the schedule, with adjourned games to be played off the morning after a first session. He said Nikolai Romanov dispatched him in May to Helsinki, where the Finns agreed to drop the morning sessions because they were afraid the world champion would pass up the event. He said the other likely members of the Soviet team reacted to this with "total silence. This seemed strange to me but it was all made clear two months later."

This was how he brought up the training session at the Voronovo rest home. Botvinnik said he lost his first two training games before playing himself into shape. Seven of his games have survived — a win and a loss with Petrosian, two draws with Geller, a loss to Isaak Boleslavsky and a win and a draw with Bronstein. He came armed with some new opening ideas, such as 1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. c×d5 e×d5 4. Nc3 c6 5. Bf4 Bf5 6. e3 Nd7 and now 7. g4!?, which he introduced to the rest of the world, in slightly different form, in his championship match with Petrosian 11 years later. His most interesting game was:

Training game, Voronovo 1952
Botvinnik–Tigran Petrosian
B21 Sicilian Defense

1. e4 c5 2. f4

Another new idea, at least for Botvinnik.

2. ... Nf6 3. d3 d5! 4. e5 Ng8

This was an original response, preparing ... Bg4 and ... Nh6–f5.

5. Nf3 Nc6 6. c3 Bg4 7. h3 B×f3 8. Q×f3 e6 9. Qf2 h5 10. Be3 Qb6 11. Qc2 h4! 12. Nd2 Nh6 13. Bf2 Nf5 14. Nf3 Be7 15. Be2 Rg8!? 16. Qd2 0–0–0 17. 0–0 d4!

Black stops 18. d4 and will attack the enemy center with ... f6 or ... g5. White turns his attention to b2–b4.

18. Rfc1 Kb8 19. Rab1! g5 20. f×g5 Qc7 21. Qf4 Rd5 22. b4?

Chances are mixed after 22. c4 or 22. Kh1, e.g. 22. Kh1 d×c3 23. b×c3 N×e5 24. c4! (24. ... N×d3 25. Q×c7+ K×c7 26. c×d5 N×f2+ 27. Kg1 Ne4).

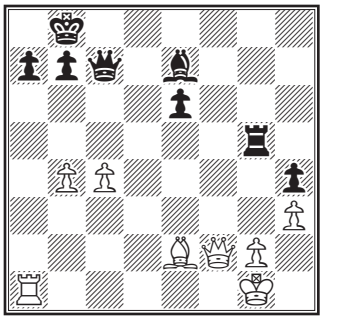
22. ... N×e5 23. c×d4 N×f3+ 24. Q×f3 c4?

Petrosian's fantasy gets away from him. He has equality but no more following 24. ... N×d4 25. B×d4 R×d4 26. Q×f7 R×g5.

25. d×c4 N×d4 26. B×d4 R×d4 27. Q×f7 R×g5 28. Qf2?

Now White gets the worst of it. Superior was 28. Bg4.

28. ... Rd2 29. Rd1 R×a2 30. Ra1 R×a1 31. R×a1 *(diagram)*
31. ... a5! 32. Kh1



After 31. R×a1

Black wins the b-pawn. White saw 32. R×a5 Q×a5! 33. b×a5 Bc5 too late.

32. ... B×b4 33. Rd1? Qg3!

This liquidates to a won ending. White had to try 33. Q×h4 since 33. ... Qg3 34. Q×g3 and Bf3 is defensible.

34. Q×g3 R×g3 35. Bf3 Kc7 36. Kg1 a4 37. Rb1 Bc5+ 38. Kf1 b6 39. Ke2 a3 40. Kd3 Rg5 41. Re1 Kd6 42. Be4 Re5! 43. Re2 Ke7 44. Ra2 Kf6 45. Ra1 Kg5 46. Rf1 Bd6 0–1 Black would have won with ... Ra5, ... Be5 and ... a2.

Botvinnik's account of the next events, in *Achieving the Aim,* is quite different from the documented version cited in the Introduction to the present work. He said he was playing a training game with Bronstein when Lev Abramov touched his shoulder and said, "You have to break off the game and go urgently to Moscow." Abramov, who was deputy head of the training session, said he and others were also called to Sports Committee headquarters to give their opinion. "I personally asserted my viewpoint, that Botvinnik had not returned to his sporting and creative form and therefore it was impossible to guarantee his success," he said.

Guarantee, the magic word. Botvinnik's version is that when he arrived, Keres was about to give deputy chairman Ivanov a guarantee of getting the best score on first board, the same one Botvinnik refused to give. He said Keres was "pale and embarrassed" during the confrontation but in the end, "It was announced in Helsinki that Botvinnik was ill." The Soviet team went to Finland without him and "just managed to take first place" after Keres lost three games "and had to be dropped," he wrote in *Achieving the Aim.* In fact, Keres played in all the rounds of the finals except the last and lost two games.

The Voronovo postmortem continued more than half a century later. Bronstein told Sergei Voronkov, for the January 2003 issue of *64*, where the idea of dropping Botvinnik came from. "Botvinnik himself is guilty," Bronstein said. The champion was out of shape because he hadn't played during the years 1948 to 1951. He failed to win the 19th Soviet Championship and "performed badly in Budapest.... It was already a scandal! In those strained international conditions he simply didn't have the right to lose to an American or a Yugoslav. You can't imagine how the psychosis was," Bronstein said. "Me, a participant in the world championship, they sent in the fall of '52 to the (world) student championship in Liverpool. Why? They feared that Najdorf or Gligorić would show up and take first place!"

Revenge

Botvinnik avenged the insult of Voronovo in the 20th Soviet Championship, which began November 29, 1952, in Moscow. He lost to his former student, Mark Taimanov, in the fourth round and stood 3½–2½ after a week's play. But in round seven:

20th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1952
David Bronstein–Botvinnik
C36 King's Gambit Accepted

1. e4 e5 2. f4!? e×f4 3. Nf3 d5 4. e×d5 Nf6 5. Bb5+ c6 6. d×c6 b×c6 7. Bc4 Nd5!

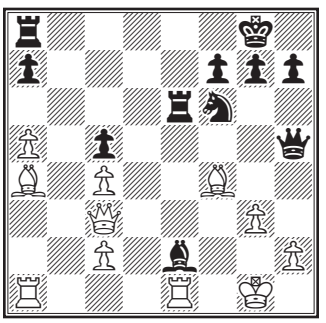
Before this game, 3. ... Nf6 was considered the main King's Gambit Accepted line. But Botvinnik had revived 6. ... b×c6 during a 1947 training game with Ragozin. He improved on a 1911 game that saw 7. ... Bd6 8. Qe2+!, which favored White. The point is that the d5-knight inhibits White's development. Botvinnik won after 8. 0–0 Bd6 9. Bb3 0–0 10. c4 Nf6 11. d4 c5! and 12. d5 Bg4 13. Nc3 a6 14. Qe1 Nbd7 followed by ... Qc7 and ... Rae8. In his preparation for the 1948 match-tournament he wrote notes to himself, adding that 8. Qe2+ Be7 9. d4 0–0 "gives White nothing." But only in 1952 was Botvinnik able to use his analysis.

8. d4 Bd6 9. 0–0 0–0 10. Nc3 N×c3 11. b×c3 Bg4 12. Qd3 Nd7 13. g3?!

This is based on 13. ... f×g3? 14. Ng5! g×h2+ 15. Kh1, since 15. ... g6 is forced (15. ... Nf6 16. R×f6). Then 16. R×f7 R×f7 17. N×f7! Qh4 18. N×d6+ wins (18. ... Kg7 19. Bf4 Rf8 20. Qg3). But 13. Bd2 and 14. Rae1 would have offered more than Bronstein's move, Botvinnik said.

13. ... Nb6 14. Bb3 c5! 15. c4?

The b3-bishop is buried after this. But 15. d×c5 B×c5+ 16. Kh1 Qc8! 17. B×f4 Qc6 and 15. B×f4 B×f4 16. g×f4 B×f3 17. R×f3 Qc7! aren't the kind of positions that White seeks when he plays 2. f4.



After 23. ... Re6

15. ... Qf6 16. Ne5!? B×e5! 17. d×e5 Q×e5 18. B×f4 Qh5 19. Rfe1 Rfe8 20. a4 Be2 21. Qc3 Nd7! 22. a5 Nf6 23. Ba4 Re6 *(diagram)*

Black's threats include 24. ... Ne4 and 24. ... Ng4. White had to try 24. Qd2 B×c4 25. R×e6 to have (slim) survival chances.

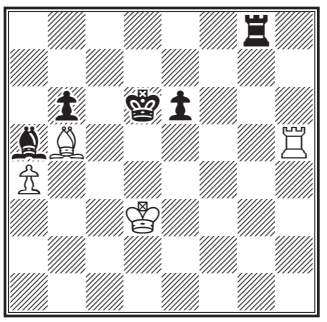
24. Kg2? Ne4 25. Qa3 g5 0–1

The outcome would be obvious after 26 B-moves Rf6.

Botvinnik was even more devastating the next day, when he crushed Keres with a new plan in the Queen's Gambit Declined that would be widely copied. Draws followed in the next five games putting first prize in doubt. One of his opponents in that string, Viktor Korchnoi, had never seen Botvinnik play until this tournament. He conferred with Geller.

"The *starik* understands, understands it all," Geller told him, using the term for "old man." (Botvinnik was all of 41.) "But he's weakened," Geller added. He was wrong: Korchnoi was lucky to draw as White.

Botvinnik's string of draws was followed by convincing wins over Ilya Kan, Georgy Ilivitsky, Geller and Oleg Moiseev, the latter in a study-like, Exchange-up endgame that would appear in textbooks. In the final round he trailed Taimanov by a full point. He had Black against the improving Alexey Suetin. His chances of sharing first prize — and proving that the Voronovo cabal had grossly underestimated him — seemed remote. Botvinnik traded queens at move 14, then sacrificed a pawn to allow his two bishops to dominate. Suetin defended well, giving up two pawns. Botvinnik found that the only way to make progress was to go into a drawish bishops-of-opposite-color ending. The game was adjourned. When it resumed, Taimanov, who had lost to Geller that round, sat in the snack bar of the Central Hall of Railroad Workers, where the tournament was being played. He waited for the handshake draw that would make him champion *(diagram)*.



Suetin–Botvinnik,
20th Soviet Championship,
Moscow 1952
After 72. ... Kd6

The super-defensive 73. Rh3! would secure the third rank and virtually exhaust Black's winning ideas. But play went:

73. Rh4? Rg3+! 74. Ke4? Bd2!

Suddenly Black threatens to win with 75. ... Re3+ 76. Kd4 e5+ 77. Kc4 Rc3+ 78. Kb4 Rh3+ or 76. Kf4 Kd5 and the advance of the e-pawn. White's only defense is 75. Kd4!.

75. Bd3? Bg5

As good as Black's move is, 75. ... Kc5! is faster. After the text, White should make Black try to win with his pawns (76. Rh2 Rg4+ 77. Kf3 R×a4).

76. Rh5? Kc5!! 0–1

White was so concerned about his a-pawn that he overlooked a mating net (77. ... Re3). There are three versions of how Taimanov reacted when he heard that White had resigned: "It's a fraud," he said according to *Half a Century of Chess.* "That's a lie!" according to *Botvinnik on the Endgame.* "You're joking!" according to *Analytical.*

Less than a month later, a six-game playoff match for the national title began in Moscow. Taimanov blundered into a lost pawn-ending in the first game. After two draws, Botvinnik virtually decided the match with this:

20th Soviet Championship playoff, Moscow 1953
Botvinnik–Mark Taimanov
E40 Nimzo-Indian Defense

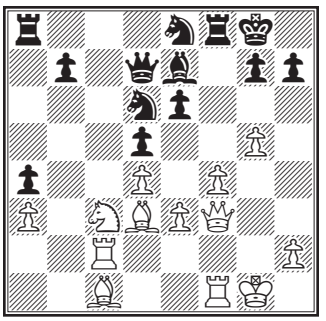
1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 Nc6 5. Ne2 d5 6. a3 Be7 7. c×d5 e×d5 8. Nf4

Taimanov was becoming the world's expert on the Nimzo-Indian and 4. ... Nc6 was his specialty. In their 20th Championship game he got the edge after the innocuous 8. g3?! 0–0 9. Bg2 Na5! 10. 0–0 c6.

8. ... 0–0 9. Be2 Bf5 10. g4! Be6 11. N×e6?!

Better is 11. g5 and 12. h4 as Botvinnik played in a similar position a year later in his first Smyslov match.

11. ... f×e6 12. 0–0 Qd7 13. f4 Nd8! 14. Bd3 Nf7



After 21. ... Nfe8

This would have been a good time for 14. ... c5!.

15. b4! a5 16. b5 Nd6 17. Qf3 a4 18. Ra2 c6 19. b×c6 Q×c6 20. Rc2 Qd7? 21. g5! Nfe8 *(diagram)*

Botvinnik armed himself with extra motivation to win the match, using a curious ethical view: Early in their tournament game a month before he offered a draw. This violated a new Championship rule that barred draws before move 30. Taimanov accepted, indicating that they would play quietly until they could legally shake hands after move 30. But then Taimanov "started playing for a win," Botvinnik wrote. This was against "the unwritten but traditional rules of chess etiquette." In other words, he was outraged that Taimanov broke an improper, if not illegal, agreement.

22. B×h7+! K×h7 23. Qh3+ Kg8 24. N×d5 Bd8 25. g6 Nf6 26. N×f6+ g×f6

White would be winning now after 27. Rg2! and 28. g7. A key line given by Botvinnik runs 27. ... Re8 28. g7 Nf7 29. Rf3 Rc8 30. Bb2 Rc7 31. Qh4 Qc8 32. Bc3! to block ... Rc2 or ... Rc1+. Then 32. ... R×c3 can be met by 33. Qh8+! N×h8 34. g×h8(Q)+ K×h8 35. Rh3 mate.

27. g7? Re8?

Black could have tied the match with 27. ... K×g7! because 28. Rg2+ Kf7 29. d5 Ke7 runs out of steam and loses, as does 28. f5 e×f5 29. Rg2+ Kf7.

28. Qh8+ Kf7 29. Qh5+ Kg8 30. Rg2 Nf7 31. Rf3!

There is no defense to Rh3 followed by Qh8+!.

31. ... Ra5 32. Qh4 e5 33. Rh3 Q×h3 34. Q×h3 and eventually 1–0

After a loss and a draw, the match ended 3½–2½ in Botvinnik's favor. He played no further chess for more than a year.

Smyslov

But he learned how several of his Voronovo rivals went to Switzerland in August 1953 for what turned out to be a suspect Candidates tournament. Bronstein waited until 2001 to describe in *64* how the Soviet delegation in Zürich, led by Dmitry Postnikov, Igor Bondarevsky and a KGB official, told him that under no circumstances should Reshevsky be allowed to win the tournament and become Botvinnik's 1954 match challenger. They wanted Smyslov to win.

The "troika," as Bronstein put it, engaged in intrigues such as ordering Keres to draw as White with Smyslov. (Keres refused and lost.) The troika also managed to convince Bronstein to make an effortless draw as White with Smyslov. They said he would be rewarded when Geller threw a later game to him. But he was double-crossed when Bondarevsky gave Geller new orders — to beat Bronstein — which he did.

After Bronstein's charges appeared, Smyslov was given a chance to respond. He called the article "scandalous." But he didn't deny it, merely saying, "It is improper to write that way about colleagues." Yuri Averbakh and Taimanov, the only other surviving Zürich players, denied knowing of the stage-managing. But they didn't deny it happened. "The most of what was demanded of me, for example, was ... to not finish ahead of our leaders [and most of all Smyslov]," Taimanov recalled.

If Botvinnik knew this it must have seemed like a repeat of Vainshtein's scheming during the final rounds of Budapest 1950. The difference is that this time it appeared that the Sports Committee and the KGB, successor to the MGD, were conspiring to choose his most dangerous challenger.

He and Vasily Vasilyevich Smyslov had much in common. Smyslov had been a prodigy, in Moscow, as Botvinnik had been in Leningrad. Smyslov's first game was published in *64* at age 14. He was also attracted early to composing: *64* published his first study at 15. Like Botvinnik, Smyslov was near-sighted, but taller, thinner and with red hair. Smyslov also had a second career, as a singer. He began serious vocal studies in 1948 and tried out for the Bolshoi Theater in 1954, getting past the first round before being eliminated. In 1996 a cassette of 18 songs, "Vasily Smyslov Sings," was issued by the Russia State Musical Center of Television and Radio.

In contrast to Botvinnik, Smyslov had a long and warm relationship with his father, a strong amateur player who taught him the moves at age 7. His family readily supported his early career. Also, he was a devout Christian and apolitical. Despite suspicions that he hated Communism, Smyslov was the darling of the Party leadership in the 1950s. "Let me say that for people on top, the No. 1 was Smyslov," Averbakh recalled. "They preferred Smyslov to be world champion because he was clearly Russian in his nationality while Botvinnik was Jewish. Botvinnik did prove himself to be a 'real' Communist," he said. "But I don't think they necessarily thought of Botvinnik in that way then."

In January and February 1954 Botvinnik prepared for his second world championship match by playing training games with Ilya Kan at Nikolina Gora. Three Botvinnik wins and a draw survive. But while he allowed Kan into his inner circle, they had a strained relationship. "You can't imagine what a strange man this Kan is," he told Averbakh. "We

were peacefully conversing when suddenly he puffed up, left to walk alone in the forest and deliberately didn't show up for lunch!" When Averbakh asked Kan about this, he said Botvinnik's strong opinions had gotten to him. "Botvinnik considers himself the world champion not only in chess. But in everything else he is a most ordinary man!" he said.

Another prematch battle over the rules broke out — even though Smyslov readily agreed to duplicate sealed move envelopes. Botvinnik said it was Smyslov who started a row when he "tried to insist that the match should start on April 15th." That would mean it would almost certainly stretch into June, when "Moscow can be hot." "I refused point blank," he said, and threatened to invoke what he called "my most cunning invention." It was the rule he had promulgated in 1949: if the two players couldn't agree on terms, the match would morph into a match-tournament. Smyslov must have seen through this bogus threat. A match-tournament would have meant adding two players from the 1953 candidates tournament, where Bronstein, Keres and Reshevsky had tied for second place. Botvinnik certainly didn't want that to happen. But as usual, the threat was stronger ... and the match began March 16.

Blitz

When Botvinnik was plagued by time trouble he treated it as he would any other deficiency. He created a rule for himself: "Play your first fifteen moves in thirty minutes." Against Smyslov he set the bar higher. He aimed to be *ahead* on time. Another part of his match strategy required opening surprises. Botvinnik had tested a rare Winawer French line (1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 Ba5!?) in a 1951 training game with Ragozin. There's no record of Smyslov's facing it before and Botvinnik sprang it in the first game. Smyslov went into an inferior ending at move 25. His flag was hanging at move 37 and he made his 40th move with five seconds to spare, only to be outplayed in the adjournment.

Two more Smyslov losses in the next three games threatened to turn the match into a rout.

World Championship, Moscow 1954, second game
Botvinnik–Vasily Smyslov
E45 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 b6

The world-class players of the 1940s and 1950s struggled to find the right move order for Black after 4. e3. His 1951 prematch notes indicate Botvinnik felt 4. ... c5 would be met by "5. Ne2!" with advantage and the best answer to 4. ... 0–0 was a good 5. a3. Smyslov tried another idea.

5. Ne2 Ba6 6. a3 Be7 7. Nf4 d5 8. c×d5

After Bronstein played 5. ... Ba6 successfully in the 1951 match, Botvinnik wrote to

himself, "Brs's idea with Ba6 is a sham." He concluded that if he got this position in the future, 8. ... B×f1 9. d×e6 "is dangerous for Black." Three years later he evaluated the sacrifice differently.

8. ... B×f1 9. K×f1! e×d5?!

Annotators blamed Black's fifth move for his difficulties. But it is his ninth move, played after nine minutes' thought and evidently not prepared in advance, that gets him into trouble.

10. g4! c6 11. g5 Nfd7 12. h4

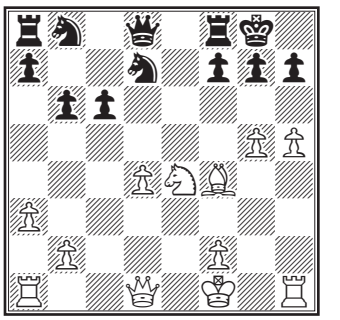
The idea of a quick mating attack in a Queen's Gambit Declined, embraced by Harry Pillsbury at the turn of the 20th century, had virtually disappeared until Botvinnik revived it against Vladimir Alatortsev in the first round of the "Euwe/Kmoch" tournament in 1934: 1. d4 e6 2. c4 d5 3. Nf3 Be7 4. Nc3 Nf6 5. Bg5 0–0 6. e3 a6 7. c×d5 e×d5 8. Bd3 c6 9. Qc2 Nbd7 and now 10. g4! N×g4? 11. B×h7+ Kh8 12. Bf4 gave White a strong initiative.

12. ... Bd6 13. e4! d×e4 14. N×e4 B×f4

Botvinnik took only nine minutes for his last five moves while Smyslov spent an hour and 11 minutes. Several improvements were available but White has an edge in all lines, e.g. 12. ... 0–0 13. Qg4 Na6 14. e4 d×e4 15. N×e4 f5 16. e×f6 N×f6 17. Qe6+ Kh8 18. h5! (Kasparov).

15. B×f4 0–0 16. h5! *(diagram)*

This was the first move Botvinnik spent significant time on (22 minutes) and it's a good one, going for a quick kill. After 16. ... Na6 17. h6! g6 18. Qa4! Black is barely hanging on (18. ... Nc7? 19. Q×c6 Ne6 20. Bd6 and wins because of 20. ... Re8 21. Q×d7!).



After 16. h5

16. ... Re8 17. Nd6 Re6

O 17. ... Re7 18. g6! and wins (18. ... f6 19. Qb3+ Kh8 20. h6!).

18. d5! R×d6!

Black loses faster after 18. ... c×d5 19. Q×d5 Na6 20. g6 Nc7 21. g×h7+ K×h7 22. Qf5+ or 20. ... Nf8 21. g×f7+ Kh8 22. h6!.

19. B×d6 Q×g5 20. Qf3!

Black would have had real counterplay after 20. d×c6? N×c6 or 20. Rc1 c5. He had only 16 minutes for the remaining 20 moves of the time control after he rejected 20. ... c×d5 21. Rg1 Qh4 22. Rg4! Qd8 23. Q×d5 (23. ... Na6 24. Be7! Qe8 25. R×g7+! K×g7 26. Qg5+ Kh8 27. h6 and wins).

20. ... Q×d5 21. Q×d5 c×d5 22. Rc1 Na6 23. b4! h6 24. Rh3 Kh7 25. Rd3 Nf6 26. b5 Nc5 27. B×c5 b×c5 28. R×c5 Rb8 29. a4 Rb7 30. Rdc3 1–0

"You Will Perish"

Tensions ran high during the match. Botvinnik's daughter Olga, who was 12 at the time, recalled how she read the incoming mail against her father's wishes. She saw a letter that read, "Damn Botvinnik! If you do not lose the match to Smyslov, fear for your life. On the fifth day after the match you will perish."

How this affected the champion is not known. But the match took a sharp turn after round 7, which happened to be the first championship game covered on television. Smyslov scored four wins and a draw to take the lead. Suddenly Botvinnik's play was unrecognizable.

Vladimir Kramnik was struck by how often "for some reason he always 'went to pieces' in one or two or even three games." That describes Botvinnik losing the 21st and 22nd games to Bronstein in 1951, his two-point collapse against Smyslov at the end of the 1958 match and a blunder in the 17th game with Mikhail Tal when he was on the verge of pulling even with him in 1960. "I have the impression that he played hard, laid himself out, strained every nerve," Kramnik added. "Apparently he failed sometimes because of such violent exertions."

The 1954 match was marked by the sharpest swings in a modern championship. Just as Smyslov seemed poised to deliver a knockout blow, Botvinnik won four of the next five games. This, too, was part of Botvinnik's professional profile, his ability to recover. "It's interesting to observe how Botvinnik gradually broke 'bad luck' and went on in maximum sporting intensity in the next game, literally squeezing each point and half point," said Vasily Panov. Other players let defeats bother them, he said. Not Botvinnik.

A less admirable trait of Botvinnik's was shown after the 14th game, one of the best Smyslov ever won. Botvinnik suspected he had been betrayed. On his way out of the playing hall he told Ilya Kan that Smyslov must have been tipped off about his opening plans.

"But Mikhail Moiseyevich, you know it isn't the first time you played this system against the King's Indian Defense and Smyslov could have been prepared," Kan said. "No," insisted Botvinnik. "He made his moves too quickly." Kan tried humor: "Is it true that only your maid Matrena could have informed him?" Botvinnik fell silent. But he never asked Kan to help him again. And, characteristically, the champion avenged the loss in the next game.

World Championship, Moscow 1954, 15th game
Vasily Smyslov–Botvinnik
B25 Sicilian Defense

1. e4 c5 2. Nc3 Nc6 3. g3 g6 4. Bg2 Bg7 5. d3 d6 6. Nge2 e5

Botvinnik's switch from 1. ... e6 to 1. ... c5 proved brilliant because he had won the 13th game easily (after 5. ... b6 6. Nge2 d6 7. 0–0 Bb7 8. f4 f5 9. g4?! f×g4). Here his

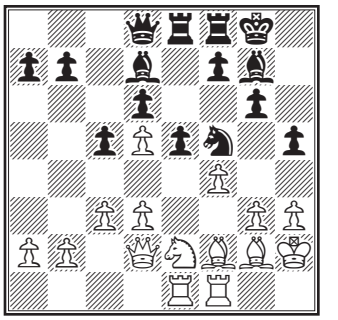
sixth move hadn't been played in master chess in more than 50 years. Thrown off balance, Smyslov took 44 minutes for his next two moves.

7. Nd5?! Nge7 8. c3?! N×d5 9. e×d5 Ne7 10. 0–0 0–0 11. f4 Bd7 12. h3 Qc7 13. Be3 Rae8 14. Qd2 Nf5 15. Bf2 h5!

Black is already better and Botvinnik felt White had to take bridge-burning risks with 16. g4!? h×g4 17. h×g4 Nh6 18. g5.

16. Rae1? Qd8 17. Kh2 *(diagram)*

Now 17. g4 h×g4 18. h×g4 would be bad after 18. ... Nh4, and 17. f×e5? would be punished by 17. ... Bh6! 18. Qc2 Ne3.



After 17. Kh2

17. ... Bh6! 18. h4 Qf6 19. Be4

Here 19. f×e5 B×d2 20. e×f6 Ne3! would lose, e.g. 21. Bf3 Bg4! 22. Ng1 B×e1 23. R×e1 B×f3 24. R×e3 R×e3 25. B×e3 B×d5. Smyslov had 32 minutes to reach move 40 while Botvinnik had more than an hour.

19. ... e×f4 20. N×f4 N×h4 21. Be3 Nf5

White likely counted on 22. N×h5 g×h5 23. B×f5 and 23. ... B×e3 24. R×e3 B×f5 25. Ref3 Re5 26. d4 but overlooked 24. ... Qg5!. The rest is a rout.

22. B×f5 Q×f5 23. Qg2 Qg4 24. Qe2 Q×e2+ 25. R×e2 Re5 26. Ree1 Rfe8 27. Bf2 h4! 28. R×e5 R×e5 29. d4 h×g3+ 30. K×g3 Rg5+! 31. Kh2 Rf5 32. Be3 c×d4 33. c×d4 Kh7 34. Rf2 g5 35. Ne2 R×f2+ 36. B×f2 f5 0–1

Botvinnik held a two-point lead after the 19th game and needed only 1½ points in the remaining five games to keep his title. But once again he limped to the finish. He lost the 20th after post-adjournment errors and was crushed in the 23rd in 28 moves. On the final day he needed a draw to tie the match. He cautiously gained an edge on the White side of a King's Indian Defense. Smyslov offered a draw at move 22. "Your offer is so attractive that it is impossible for me to refuse it," Botvinnik replied.

Why did Smyslov fail despite his considerable gifts and a 10-year edge in age? "I think there can be only one answer," Botvinnik wrote in *Analytical.* "In positional understanding I was nevertheless somewhat superior to the challenger." This was in tune with his belief that an older player compensates for his eroding ability to calculate. He gave Smyslov his due as "undoubtedly the strongest tournament player in the world" during 1953–1958. But he left the reader to understand why he used the word "tournament."

Botvinnik was noticeably absent later in 1954 when the Soviet team played a series of matches abroad with foreign teams. He even managed to skip politically important matches in New York and London. "He said he was tired after the match with Smyslov," Averbakh recalled. "But the true reason, I think, is that Botvinnik didn't like to fly in an airplane." Bronstein had a different explanation for why Botvinnik avoided being on the

same national team that he had fought to join two years before: "He generally didn't think about being with us. He didn't go in '46 to the Moscow–Prague match, didn't go to the '49 Moscow–Budapest match, didn't go to the '55 USSR–Hungary match. He gave the impression that it was uninteresting," Bronstein told Sergei Voronkov.

Botvinnik Takes a Move Back

Botvinnik believed his strategic expertise went beyond the chess board. On May 29, 1954, he wrote to Pyotr Nikolayevich Pospelov, the ideology chief of the Central Committee and top editor of *Pravda.* His letter was titled "Can There be a World Socialist Revolution without World War III?" and it presented this view: World Wars I and II brought great advances for Socialism. But a third war would not ignite the revolution in the West that the Party regarded as inevitable. No, it would be self-destructive because it would be fought with nuclear weapons. The best policy is one of accommodating the West and co-opting its lower classes, Botvinnik argued. He expanded on this pessimistic view of the chances for world revolution during a 1991 lecture at the Central Chess Club. "I proved it was impossible and it was necessary to go the way of reform," he said. But it would have been "quixotic" to express this idea when Stalin was alive, he added.

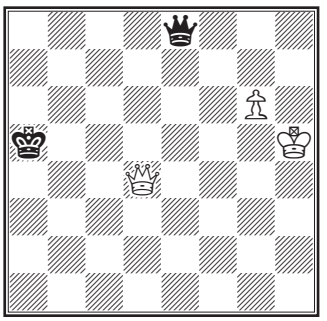
Botvinnik's disenchantment with the "great leader" began before Stalin's death in 1953. He later claimed Stalin was "not a true Communist"—as Botvinnik was—and he had begun to doubt his truthfulness during the period of the "Doctors' Plot" of 1952-53, when the Kremlin was preparing an anti–Semitic campaign based on the idea that Jewish physicians had secretly assassinated Soviet leaders. Actually, Botvinnik's view of nuclear war was not so heretical. By March 1954 Georgy Malenkov had become a member of the post–Stalin "collective leadership" of the USSR. Malenkov, a Technocratic Marxist like Botvinnik, said an exchange of atomic weapons would be a disaster for the USSR. Peaceful coexistence may be preferable, said Malenkov.

But Malenkov could say things that a mere chess champion could not. Pospelov wrote to the Central Committee's top body, the Politburo, a memo titled "About the Errors of M.M. Botvinnik." It said Botvinnik sounded like a British ban-the-bomber and had developed "a liberal-pacifist, anti–Marxist conception of 'compromise' with imperialists." Botvinnik should be summoned to the agitation and propaganda section of the Central Committee and be given a warning, he said. If he did not recant his heresy, he would be expelled from the Party. Pospelov replied to Botvinnik on June 19, 1954. "Thank you for pointing out my errors," Botvinnik responded in December, and dropped the subject. "Botvinnik took a move back," Averbakh summed up.

Olympiad

Four months after the Smyslov match, the world champion returned to chess at the Olympiad in Amsterdam. His best game was an elegant rook-and-knight ending win

from Gideon Ståhlberg in the first round of the finals. But his most significant game, played five days later, rewrote endgame theory *(diagram)*.



Botvinnik–Nikolay Minev, Amsterdam 1954
After 79. ... Ka5

The K+Q+NP–vs.–K+Q ending was dismissed as a draw when Reuben Fine wrote *Basic Chess Endings* in 1941. If the king tries to shepherd the pawn to the eighth rank it allows perpetual check, he said. But in 1944 Botvinnik won with a knight pawn against Grigory Ravinsky. Keres later pointed out a better defense so the Ravinsky game was not considered definitive. Fine's conclusion still held.

After adjourning this game, Botvinnik stayed up until 3 A.M. in search of a new strategy. "Eureka, I found the method of winning," he recalled. His king should try to be on the *same file or rank* as the other king. Then there are opportunities for meeting a check with a check, forcing a trade of queens. Play went:

80. Kg5! Qe7+ 81. Kf5! Qf8+ 82. Ke4

Databases say these moves are best for both sides and 82. ... Qc8 would keep the game going another 24 moves. Black's next move shortens the outcome by only two moves.

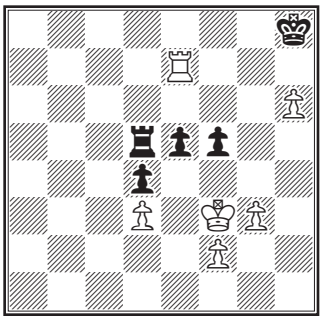
82. ... Qh6?! 83. Qe5+ Ka4 84. g7 Qh1+ 85. Kd4 Qd1+ 86. Kc5 Qc1+ 87. Kd6 Qd2+ 88. Ke6 Qa2+ 89. Qd5! Qe2+ 90. Kd6 Qh2+ 91. Kc5! 1–0

The winning cross-checks would be 91. ... Qc2+ 92. Qc4+, 91. ... Qf2+ 92. Qd4+ and 91. ... Qc7+ 92. Qc6+.

After eight rounds the Soviets held a five-point lead over Argentina and had only one strong opponent left, West Germany. But in that match Botvinnik quickly obtained a lost position against Wolfgang Unzicker. "The whole game I hung on by my finger tips," he wrote. He adjourned after 48 moves in a position that was resignable "according to the general opinion of experts."

Isaak Boleslavsky helped him analyze that night but eventually fell asleep. Botvinnik went to Salo Flohr's room and woke him. After more work "I sent him off to rest" at 2 A.M. "with the warning that at 8 A.M. he should come back and assess the results of the analysis." Flohr's loyalty is commendable considering how Botvinnik had him analyze the wrong position of the 23rd game with Bronstein three years before.

Botvinnik went to bed at 5 A.M. Flohr duly returned at 8 A.M. and showed him a winning line for White. There were others. Shortly after they resumed play *(diagram)*:



Wolfgang Unzicker–Botvinnik, Amsterdam 1954
After 56. ... Rd5

Now 57. h7! wins, e.g. 57. ... e4+ 58. d×e4+ f×e4+ 59. R×e4 wins or 57. ... Ra5 58. Rf7!. "But perhaps my opponent did not want to give up his h-pawn?" Botvinnik wrote.

57. g4 e4+! 58. d×e4 f×g4+! 59. Ke2!

"Of course, I was not really hoping for 59. K×g4? d3!"

59. ... d3+ 60. Kd2 Rd4 61. Re8+?

Flohr had found 61. e5! Rf4 and now 62. Rg7! Re4 63. Rg5 wins. Botvinnik thought he had refuted 61. e5 in his morning analysis with 61. ... Rd5. But when the 60. ... Rd4 position arose, he realized "to my horror," that 61. e5 Rd5 62. e6 Rd6 63. Re8+! would win, e.g. 63. ... Kh7 64. e7 Re6 65. K×d3 Re5 66. Kd4 Re6 67. Kd5 Re2 68. Kd6 Rd2+ 69. Ke5! Re2+ 70. Kf4! R×f2+ 71. Ke3.

61. ... Kh7 62. Re6 Ra4! 63. K×d3 Ra3+ 64. Ke2 Rf3!

Botvinnik's adjournment skill had worked its magic again. Unzicker thought 40 minutes before he concluded that even two extra pawns did not guarantee a win.

65. e5 Rf5 66. Ke1 Rf4 67. Rf6

A last try. The pawn ending, 67. ... R×f6? 68. e×f6 K×h6, turns out to be a win, 69. Ke2 Kg6 70. Ke3 K×f6 71. Kf4 g3! 72. f×g3!.

67. ... Re4+! 68. Kf1 R×e5 69. Kg2 Ra5 70. Kg3 Rg5 71. Kh4 Rg8 72. Kh5 g3 Draw

"The most elegant way to draw" after 73. Rf7+ Kh8 74. h7 was 74. ... Rg4! (75. K×g4 g2), Botvinnik wrote. But not 74. ... g2?? 75. h×g8(Q)+ K×g8 76. Rf6! and Rg6+.

The draw left with Soviet team with a six-point lead over Yugoslavia with two rounds ago. It was safe enough for Botvinnik to take the last two days off. He easily secured the best score on first board with 8½ points out of 11. But he had to admit, as he later wrote, that at 43, "I was playing opponents who were my equal."

However, he added, "with equality of strength there is always some advantage on the side of the player who is more skilled in research work." And that was enough to win two world championship matches.

Angering Caissa

The was no "purity" to his play, as Botvinnik put it, in his 12th and last Soviet Championship tournament, in February–March 1955. In its place was inconsistency. Bursts of genius were interspersed with lifeless losses. His revenge-taking of the 20th Soviet Championship was turned around. This time Keres, Geller and Smyslov beat him fairly easily. But he saved hopeless-looking endings against Simagin and Georgy Borisenko and won a bishops-of-opposite-color ending from Alexander Kotov that would become a staple of textbooks. One of his most striking wins was a bit lucky:

22nd Soviet Championship, Moscow 1955
Vladimir Antoshin–Botvinnik
C19 French Defense

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 B×c3+ 6. b×c3 Qc7 7. Nf3 Ne7 8. Bd3 Nd7

Botvinnik's opponents still were unsure whether a3–a4 was right in the Winawer. They remembered that his game with Alexander Tolush in the 14th Soviet Championship went 6. ... Ne7 7. Nf3 Qa5 8. Bd2 c4 9. a4 Nd7 10. Be2 Nb6 11. 0–0 N×a4 and Black won. It took time to appreciate that leaving the pawn at a3, as Antoshin does, will deny White a chance for Ba3!.

9. 0–0 c4 10. Be2 Nb6 11. Ne1!

Annotating the Tolush game, Botvinnik wrote somewhat grandly, "One can only be surprised: How do opponents go into a system of the French Defense prepared by me without serious investigation of the opening?" Here White does contribute a new idea, a knight maneuver to g2 so it can go strongly to e3 or f4. It "was later employed by Fischer," Botvinnik wrote (although there's no record of such a Fischer game). Few appreciated the idea at the time. "White's maneuver, in connection with the transfer of the knight to g2 does not make a convincing impression," Alexander Chistyakov said in the tournament book.

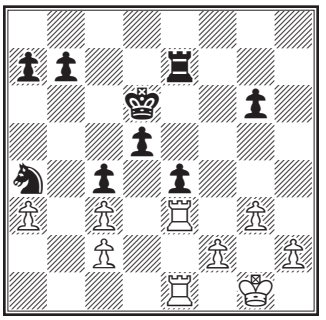
11. ... Na4! 12. Bd2 Bd7 13. g3 0–0–0 14. Ng2 f6 15. e×f6 g×f6 16. Bg4 Ng6? 17. Re1 Rde8 18. Qf3!

Black should have pushed his e-pawn on either of the last two moves. Now it's too late: 18. ... e5 19. Ne3! would have been strong.

18. ... Rhf8 19. Bh6 Rf7 20. Nf4 Qd6 21. Re3! e5!

This offers an Exchange sacrifice that's more promising than 21. ... f5 22. Bh5 Rg8 23. Rae1, when White's control of dark squares favors him.

22. N×g6 h×g6 23. d×e5 R×e5 24. Bf4 Rfe7!



After 30. ... K×d6

White has a simple positional edge after 24. ... R×e3 25. Q×e3. The Exchange advantage is much harder to win with.

25. B×e5 f×e5 26. Qf8+ Kc7 27. B×d7 Q×d7 28. Rae1 e4 29. Qf6 Qd6 30. Q×d6+ K×d6 *(diagram)*

White would have good winning chances after 31. f3! or, as the game goes, with 32. g4!.

31. f4 b5 32. Kg2? N×c3!

The rook will be trapped after 33. R×c3 d4. But that's better than 33. g4 d4 34. Rg3 d3!, when the d-pawn wins.

33. R×c3 d4 34. a4! d×c3 35. a×b5 Kc5 36. g4?

Botvinnik blamed White's failure to draw on the "psychological trauma" of being surprised at move 32. He said White "should not lose" after 36. Kf2! Rd7 37. R×e4 Rd2+ 38. Re2 and then 38. ... K×b5 39. R×d2 c×d2 40. Ke2 c3 41. f5! g×f5 42. h4 a5 43. h5. Both players would queen but White cannot escape perpetual check after 43. ... a4 44. h6 a3 45. h7 a2 46. h8(Q) a1(Q) 47. Qe8+ because his king can't hide, e.g. 47. ... Kb4 48. Qb8+ Ka3?? 49. Qb3 mate.

36. ... Rd7! 37. Re2 K×b5 38. h4 a5 39. h5 g×h5 40. g5!

There was no hope in 40. g×h5 a4 41. R×e4 a3 42. Re1 Rd2+ 43. Kg3 R×c2 44. h6 Rd2 45. Rh1 Rd8 46. Kg4 c2 (Khalifman).

40. ... Rd2! 41. Kf2 h4! 42. g6 R×e2+ 43. K×e2 h3 44. g7 h2 45. g8(Q) h1(Q) 46. Qd5+ Kb4 47. f5 Qf3+ 48. Ke1 Qe3+ 49. Kd1 Qf2! 0–1

This time the Black king can escape the checks and hide around a2.

Botvinnik was in first place going into the final round but "apparently, in some way, I had angered the chess goddess Caissa," he wrote. Keres crushed his French Defense in 27 moves. That dropped him into a four-way tie for third place, behind Geller and Smyslov.

What Soviet media called the big chess event of 1955 went unmentioned in Botvinnik's memoirs. This was a U.S.–USSR rematch in Moscow, June 29 to July 6. He trained with the team at Zvenigorod, not far from his *dacha,* and played training games with Averbakh. But he lost the first game of the match to Reshevsky and cautiously drew the other three. The home team improved on their 20–12 score in New York in 1954, by winning 25–7. But this was thanks to 4–0 scores by Smyslov, Petrosian and Kotov. The world champion was a liability.

Botvinnik and FIDE

Botvinnik's chess activity for the rest of 1955 was largely confined to more training games with Averbakh and FIDE politics. He attended FIDE's congress in August, around

the time of the interzonal tournament, and came armed with proposals. "I tried to organize the grandmasters back in 1955, proposing to the congress at Göteborg to create under FIDE a commission in which would be chessplayers who played in the world championship and other competitions," he later recalled. He "sweetened the pill" by inviting FIDE President Folke Rogard to head the commission, he said. "But the clever lawyer understood that this meant a limit on his authority" and headed off the plan.

A more remarkable Botvinnik idea concerned the next candidates tournament. The prevailing grandmaster view was that a world championship challenger was physically exhausted and had used up his best opening ideas by the time he reached a title match. But Botvinnik claimed the challenger had an unfair *advantage* because he had been battle-tested in the candidates tournament. He asked Rogard "to allow me to take part *hors concours*" in the tournament set for Amsterdam in 1956. "Rogard himself decided nothing and undertook a poll" of the ten men who had qualified for Amsterdam. "My proposal summoned up a categorical objection of the grandmaster of Argentina, Pilnik," Botvinnik said in a 1977 lecture, adding that other candidates also objected.

His third proposal to FIDE was the most controversial. The rules for Botvinnik's first two world championship matches stipulated that if the challenger had won, the defeated champion would get a chance to regain his title in a three-man match-tournament consisting of him, the new champion and a third player. Botvinnik wanted to eliminate the third player. This would mean giving a defeated champion the right to a return match, like the one Max Euwe played with Alexander Alekhine in 1937 (and which Alekhine refused to grant José Capablanca after 1927).

Rogard wanted to put the issue off until the 1956 FIDE congress, to be held during the next Olympiad, according to *Achieving the Aim*. When a procedural matter concerning the proposal came up at Göteborg, only one delegate, from South Africa, backed Rogard, Botvinnik said. Rogard, "white as a sheet," asked Botvinnik after the vote if he should resign. Botvinnik said he should have said "yes" but instead "reacted like a feeble intellectual" and Rogard kept his job. It is hard to evaluate Botvinnik's account of this dispute because he tended to exaggerate his importance in FIDE matters and downplay that of other players. For example, in 1991 he said, "I was the only world champion who fought for the interests of chess." He added that "all my challengers ... defended group interests and took part in slander."

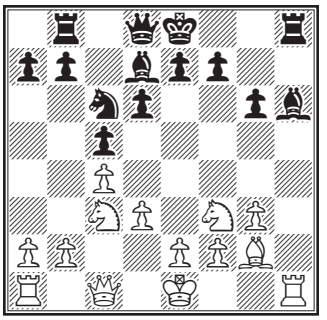
In any case, the rematch issue resurfaced at the next FIDE congress in Moscow. Averbakh, who considered the return match proposal "completely unfair," said the Soviet delegation was led by Ragozin and Lev Abramov, the new chess section head and "also a friend of Botvinnik." They got the congress to approve the return match rule, he said. Rogard liked to balance matters between East and West, Averbakh added. Since the return match favored the Soviet incumbent, Rogard sought to offset it with the rule that limited the number of players from one federation in a candidates tournament. The upshot was that *both* measures favored Botvinnik personally, Averbakh said, since his strongest future challengers were from the Soviet Union.

The Olympiad, held in Moscow's Central Theater of the Red Army, was another easy Soviet victory. After nine rounds, the USSR team led the second-place Yugoslavs by

three points and met them in the tenth and penultimate round. Botvinnik's three colleagues drew, so it was his victory that virtually clinched the gold medals.

Olympiad, Moscow 1956
Botvinnik–Svetozar Gligorić
A37 English Opening

1. c4 g6 2. g3 c5 3. Bg2 Bg7 4. Nc3 Nc6 5. Nf3 Nh6 6. h4! d6 7. d3 Rb8 8. h5 Bd7



After 11. Qc1

Botvinnik regarded 8. ... f6 as necessary but Black understandably disliked 9. h×g6 h×g6 10. Nh4!.

9. B×h6! B×h6 10. h×g6 h×g6 11. Qc1! *(diagram)*

"There was such loud applause after this move that play on all boards was stopped for about 15 minutes," Nikolay Minev, playing for Bulgaria, recalled. Of course, 11. ... B×c1 allows 12. R×h8 mate.

11. ... Bg7 12. R×h8+ B×h8 13. Qh6

Botvinnik considered Black to be lost but 13. ... Bf6 14. Ng5 Bf5! offered chances, e.g. 15. Nh7 B×c3+ 16. b×c3 Kd7 (Khalifman).

13. ... B×c3+ 14. b×c3 e6?

This allows White to win quickly with 15. Kd2!, preparing Rh1. Black would still be in the game after 14. ... Bg4! 15. Ng5 Qb6 because 16. Qh8+? Kd7 17. Qh4 allows 17. ... Qb2! 18. Q×g4+ f5! and Black wins.

15. Ng5?! Ke7 16. Kd2 Be8?

Black should have offered a trade of queens (16. ... Qh8). The rest is an I'm-lost-anyway king march.

17. Qg7 Kd7 18. f4 Qe7 19. Rh1 Nd8 20. Ne4! Kc7 21. Rh8 Bc6 22. Nf6! Kb6

Or 22. ... B×g2 23. Re8 and 22. ... Bd7 23. Rf8 followed by 24. Ng8.

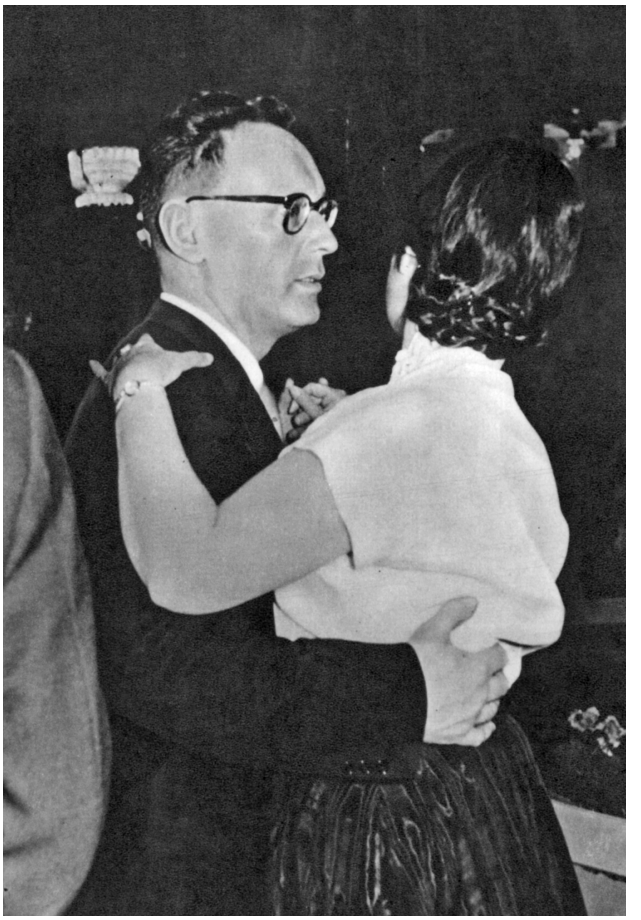
23. B×c6 N×c6 24. Rh7 Nd8 25. Q×g6 Ka6 26. a4 Ka5?! 27. Qg5 K×a4 28. Rh1 Kb3 29. Qh4 Kb2 30. g4! 1–0

Mate follows after 31. Qe1. Botvinnik sat out the final round and finished with 9½–3½.

A Dialogue Is a Monologue

It was in 1955 to 1957 that Yuri Averbakh became Botvinnik's regular sparring partner at Nikolina Gora. "I, of course, was interested in training with the world champion and

agreed," he recalled. "But I was surprised by the conditions he set — to play with the radio turned on, as if to make it like the real situation of a noisy spectator hall." Botvinnik placed a black radio on his chess table next to the board. After listening to it spew out boring news for five hours, Averbakh was "stupefied." Botvinnik had trained in a similar way with Ragozin when he wanted to overcome cigarette smoke. He not only got Ragozin to smoke during the training games but had him do it "in his face," Averbakh said. As he got to know Botvinnik better, he realized his methods made some sense: "This was a man who had a rare capacity for auto-suggestion, perhaps even self-hypnosis. Later, when he was occupied with computers, he thought up the special term 'self-programmed.' If during play the noise in the tournament hall began to act on his nerves, he convinced himself: 'But I specially trained against noise — it means the noise cannot disturb me!' And it didn't disturb him!"



The tournament book of the Moscow 1956 Olympiad team tournament featured several photographs of the world champion, including this one of him dancing with Gayane at the Bolshoi Theater.

The two men ended up playing about 25 training games, through 1957. The exact score is unknown but Averbakh said Botvinnik came out ahead. He said they also talked politics, about the 20th Communist Party Congress, the execution of Lavrentia Beria and other topical matters. "He was not, as is mistakenly said, a 'hard-nosed Stalinist.'" Averbakh said. But he was adamant in his views: "No one could persuade him about anything. It was a weakness of his. He basically understood a dialogue was a monologue. He spoke and I listened and admired."

One of the subjects on which Botvinnik considered himself an expert was how much a player should play. The model to follow was Botvinnik himself. When he played 50 games in the eight months, from the Moscow Olympiad through the second Smyslov match, it was too many. "When I ceased to experience chess 'hunger' I always played without any drive," he wrote. Nevertheless he appeared to have plenty of zest during the tournament marking the tenth anniversary of Alekhine's death, in October 1956.

Alekhine Memorial, Moscow 1956
Botvinnik–László Szabó
A21 English Opening

1. c4 g6 2. g3 Bg7 3. Bg2 e5 4. Nc3 Ne7 5. d3 c6 6. e4!

Botvinnik continued to rewrite opening theory in the 1950s. On the day after this game, he played 1. e4 e6 2. d3 and then 2. ... d5 3. Nd2 Nf6 4. Ngf3 c5 5. g3 Nc6 6. Bg2 Be7 7. 0–0 0–0 8. Re1 against Wolfgang Uhlmann.

That position, known by every serious player today, dates from a 1907 Nimzowitsch game, which continued 8. ... Qc7 9. e×d5?. Botvinnik was one of the first to realize that White should play e4–e5! instead. He won a model game after 8. ... Rb8 9. e5! Nd7 10. Nf1! b5 11. h4! Ba6 12. N1h2.

In this game he adopts another Nimzowitsch idea, the mixture of e2–e4 with c2–c4, and avoids 6. Nf3 d5!.

6. ... d6 7. Nge2 a6 8. a4 a5 9. Be3 Be6 10. 0–0 Qd7 11. b3 h5

Botvinnik thought Black's finesse at moves 7–8, which was designed to exploit White's hole at b4, lost too much time. Yet Black would have had a fine game after 11. ... Bh3! followed by ... h5–h4.

12. h4! Bh3 13. d4 0–0 14. Ra2!

Black had nothing better than kingside castling after 12. h4. But now White will threaten Rd2 and d×e5 before Black is ready.

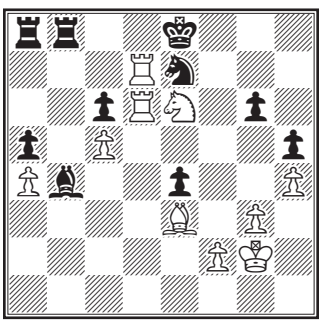
14. ... B×g2 15. K×g2 d5? 16. d×e5 d×c4?

Black didn't like 15. ... Qc7 16. Rd2! but must have miscalculated something. He would be only slightly worse after 16. ... d×e4 (17. Bf4 Qg4).

17. b×c4 B×e5 18. Q×d7! N×d7 19. Rd2 B×c3

Quite lost was 19. ... Rad8 20. Rfd1. But 19. ... Nf6 20. Rb1, which Botvinnik dismissed, is not clearly bad after 20. ... Rfb8.

20. R×d7! Bb4 21. c5! Rfe8 22. Rfd1!



After 27. Ne6

This was superior to 22. R×b7 Rad8 with counterplay. Now if Black defends the b-pawn with a rook, White wins with 23. Rc7 and Rdd7.

22. ... f5 23. R×b7 f×e4 24. Rd6 Kf7 25. Nf4 Reb8 26. Rbd7 Ke8 27. Ne6 1–0 *(diagram)*

White wins after 27. ... Nd5 28. Bg5, with a threat of 29. R×d5 and 30. Re7 mate. Or 27. ... Nf5 28. Nc7+ Kf8 29. Rf6+.

Botvinnik was leading by a point when he was badly

beaten in the last round, again as Black by Keres. But his 11–4 score was enough to share first place with Smyslov. His prize was announced as 9,000 rubles (perhaps less than $300 in 2013 U.S. dollars but quite a nice payday for a Soviet citizen then).

David Bronstein, who finished fifth, recalled what the political pressure to win was like during this era. After Reshevsky defeated Botvinnik in the 1955 U.S.–USSR match, American supporters tried to arrange a longer match with the champion. Reshevsky wanted to play 12 games in Moscow and 12 games in the U.S. for a $6,000 prize fund. Botvinnik refused, as did Smyslov. Then, Bronstein remembers, he was approached by the *vlasti* to play Reshevsky.

"They called me and asked, 'Can you guarantee first place?' I say, 'How is it possible to give a guarantee?'"

"'No,' they say, you sign a paper that you will win the match."

He said he was called to the Central Committee, which demanded that he sign a guarantee. "'I can't sign!' I say."

"'No,' they say, 'without the paper there won't be a match.'" "'Well, how can I give a guarantee? What if I blunder a knight in some game?'"

"'You can't blunder a knight,' they tell me. 'You are a Soviet man. Let Reshevsky blunder!'" "After such words, I said, 'Give me the paper, I'll sign!' But the match wasn't held because of Hungarian events," he said, alluding to the Hungarian revolt and Soviet invasion of October 1956.

Smyslov Again

Botvinnik's notes show that he prepared for the 1957 world championship match with skiing, ice skating, "salt baths," walking and sleeping "with the window ajar." He spent four days a week on chess at Nikolina Gora. This was increased to six days just before the match. He played training games with Averbakh, who felt later that they had played too much, too close to the match and this told on Botvinnik's nerves.

Botvinnik reloaded his openings arsenal with notes he put on small index cards. This was much like the openings archive on cards that was later created for Soviet players at the Central Chess Club. The world's greatest chess club — which soon became known simply as "The Club" — had opened on August 18, 1956, on Moscow's Gogolevsky Boulevard, thanks in part to Botvinnik. The building had a remarkable history:

In tsarist times it was the residence of Baroness Nadezhda Von Meck, best known for her financial support for Pyotr Tchaikovsky (he dedicated his Fourth Symphony to her). After the Revolution it became the home of the Supreme Court of the Republic, frequented by Nikolai Krylenko when he was state prosecutor and justice commissar. In the 1930s it was a shelter for political emigrants including Markus Wolf, later the infamous East German spymaster. After the war the building housed Dalstroi, an organization created by the NKVD to plan the use of Gulag labor in the Soviet Far East. Smyslov is credited with suggesting that the building be made into a chess club. Botvinnik used his influence with Yekaterina Furtseva, the first woman Politburo member, to ensure it was.

Despite Botvinnik's claim that the 1957 match "showed my inadequate preparation," he started with a good answer to Smyslov's 1. e4.

World Championship, Moscow 1957, fourth game
Vasily Smyslov–Botvinnik
B66 Sicilian Defense

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 c×d4 4. N×d4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Bg5 e6 7. Qd2 a6 8. 0–0–0 h6

This last move is a refinement over Botvinnik's previous favorite, 7. ... h6 8. B×f6 g×f6 (8. ... Q×f6? 9. Ndb5). The difference is that after 7. ... a6 8. 0–0–0 h6 9. B×f6 Black can retake with the queen. Botvinnik tested 8. ... h6 in January in a training game with Averbakh, who played 9. Bf4 Bd7 10. Bg3 Be7 11. Be2 and got the worst of 11. ... 0–0 12. f4 N×d4 13. Q×d4 Bc6 14. Bf3 Qa5 15. Bel! Qc7 16. h4 b5 17. g4 b4! 18. Ne2 Qb7 19. Ng3? d5! 20. e5 Ne4.

9. Be3 Bd7 10. f3 b5 11. N×c6 B×c6 12. Qf2 Qc7 13. Bd3 Be7 14. Qg3! g6 15. Kb1 0–0–0 16. Qf2? Kb7!

Now 17. a4 can be met by 17. ... b4. Smyslov missed his chance for a strong 16. a4! and then 16. ... Qb7 17. a×b5 a×b5 18. Na2 and Nb4 or 16. ... Qa5 17. a×b5 a×b5 18. Qe1 b4 19. Na2.

17. Ne2 e5 18. Nc1 d5! 19. e×d5 N×d5 20. Rhe1 f5

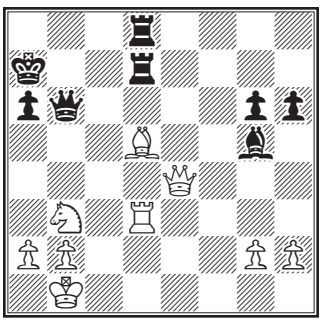
Although he appears to be getting the upper hand, Black can't hurry since 20. ... N×e3 21. Q×e3 Bd6 22. Be4! and a bishop trade favors White.

21. Nb3 N×e3! 22. Q×e3 Bd6 23. c4! b×c4 24. B×c4 Qb6 25. Qe2?

Petrosian, who was impressed with this game, said White should have sought the equality of 25. Bd5!.

25. ... Ka7 26. Rc1 Bb7 27. Red1 e4! 28. Bd5 Bf4 29. B×b7?

White will get a pawn for the Exchange but not enough attack. Correct was 29. Rc5 B×d5 30. Rc×d5 or 29. ... e×f3 30. Q×f3 B×h2 31. g3 Rhe8 32. Na5 (Petrosian).



After 34. ... Bg5

29. ... B×c1 30. Bd5 Be3 31. f×e4 f×e4 32. Qc4 Rh7! 33. Q×e4 Rhd7 34. Rd3 Bg5 *(diagram)*

Black threatens 35. ... Qg1+ and would have winning chances after 35. a3!? R×d5 36. R×d5 Q×b3.

35. Qf3? R×d5! 36. R×d5 Qg1+ 37. Kc2 Rc8+ 38. Kd3 Qb1+ 39. Kd4 Q×b2+ 40. Ke4 Re8+ 41. Kd3 0–1 (before 41. ... Re3+).

Arpad Elo's historical ratings show that Smyslov had replaced Botvinnik as the world's best player by 1955. But in this match they seemed to be dead even. The lead switched from Smyslov to Botvinnik after the fifth game, back to Smyslov after the eighth. The challenger led by one point when Botvinnik won the 13th game and he missed good winning chances in the 14th and 15th game, which were drawn like the 16th.

But Botvinnik blundered on the 41st move of the 17th game, playing uncharacteristically quickly. The next morning he offered a draw through the chief arbiter because he didn't see "an active plan" for Smyslov, according to his second, Grisha Goldberg. Smyslov refused and slowly outplayed him in a bishop-vs.-knight ending. This was a bad sign: Botvinnik had never been outplayed that clearly in an adjourned world championship game. Botvinnik might have rallied in the 18th game but Smyslov found a study-like draw in a bishops-of-opposite-color ending and kept a two-point lead.

Once again, Botvinnik's sense of realism took over. He made quick draws in three of the four remaining games and surrendered his title on April 27 by a score of 9½–12½.

Revenge?

Botvinnik said he spent two months deciding whether to exercise his newly acquired right to a return match. He used the time to learn how to profit from losing. He later told Boris Turov, editor of *Analytical,* that he was able to win two rematches because "from the loss of first match, I drew rich material for study of myself and my partner. The partner in the *match-revansh* remained the same one as in the first struggle. But I turned out to be different." And when asked in 1972 whether, at his peak, he would have been able to beat Bobby Fischer, Botvinnik said it all depended on whether there could be a rematch, so he could apply what he learned from their first match.

The conventional wisdom of 1957 was that Smyslov won because of superior stamina, clock management and opening preparation. "Time and again towards the fifth hour we have seen Botvinnik weaken and tire," arbiter Harry Golombek wrote. "This had never been the case with Smyslov, who has been rock-like in his powers of endurance." Botvinnik knew he could do better in the openings in a rematch and that would help him avoid time pressure. But how could he erase Smyslov's ten-year age advantage? Besides his own doubts, there was political pressure, "varied and persistent," for him to retire from championship play, he said. "They tried to persuade me to give up the return match." The argument was that Botvinnik might "disgrace" himself in a futile last hurrah.

Botvinnik said he was still undecided when Boris Podtserob pressed him. Earlier in 1957 Podtserob had returned from a stint as Soviet ambassador to Turkey and was promoted to secretary general of the foreign ministry. "Mikhail Moiseyevich, you simply must play the match," he said. "I have studied you, you simply can't just 'live.' If you opt out of the struggle for the world championship then you will think up something else to undertake. It is better if you just play chess."

According to Boris Spassky, the key to Botvinnik's success was convincing FIDE that the rematch had to be held within one year of the first match. "The secret was simple.

The winner couldn't recover physically in one year but Botvinnik began to prepare for the revenge match while losing the first," Spassky said. Smyslov seemed to agree with this when, near the end of his life he said, "I hadn't finished accepting congratulations on victory in the match when Botvinnik was already intensively preparing for the new match."

Round Three

The third match with Smyslov was scheduled to begin March 4, 1958, in the Concert Hall of the Hotel Sovietskaya. But, as usual, the skirmishing began earlier. Normally Botvinnik was "very friendly" to Smyslov, said Viktor Malkin, who knew them both. "But Botvinnik couldn't play with a person with whom he was friendly, therefore before each match with Smyslov (as with others) he had to quarrel." Lev Abramov, in the semi-official verdict in the Soviet chess yearbook, said Smyslov "clearly underestimated the difficulties in preparation for the *match-revansh*." Botvinnik's adoption of the Caro-Kann, an opening he had never played before, had a devastating impact on Smyslov, Abramov said. Botvinnik won the first three games, two of them Caro's. The new champion didn't look comfortable as White until Botvinnik switched to the Sicilian.

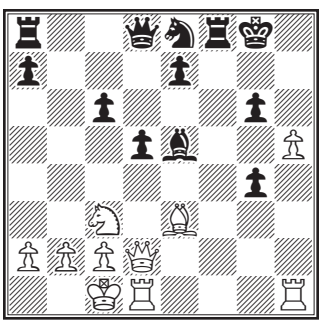
World Championship, Moscow 1958, ninth game
Vasily Smyslov–Botvinnik
B72 Sicilian Defense

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 c×d4 4. N×d4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Be2 g6 7. Be3 Bg7 8. h4 h5

In the fifth game Smyslov went into an endgame after 8. ... 0–0 9. h5 d5 10. h×g6 h×g6 and 11. e×d5 N×d5 12. N×c6 b×c6 13. N×d5 Q×d5 14. Q×d5. Chances were balanced until Botvinnik erred on the 39th move, then blundered into a mate on the 40th.

9. f3 0–0 10. Qd2 d5 11. N×c6! b×c6 12. e5 Ne8 13. f4

White delays the explosive g2–g4. Khalifman noted how 13. g4!? h×g4 14. f×g4 B×e5 15. 0–0–0 Nf6 could turn out badly: 16. h5 B×g4? 17. h×g6 B×e2 18. g7! or 17. ... B×c3 18. Q×c3 B×e2 19. g7 B×d1 20. Bd4 Bh5 21. Qe3 and wins. Once White commits to 13. f4 he has to sacrifice the g-pawn or get the worst of 13. ... f6 14. e×f6 N×f6.



After 18. h5

13. ... f6 14. 0–0–0! f×e5 15. f×e5 B×e5 16. g4! B×g4 17. B×g4 h×g4 18. h5 *(diagram)*

Allowing h×g6 — or playing ... g×h5 — seems like suicide. But computers have doubts about 18. ... g×h5 19. R×h5 Bf6 20. Rg1 Qd7, for example.

18. ... g5! 19. B×g5 Qd6 20. Rh4

Now 20. ... g3 21. Rg4 Kh8? loses to 22. B×e7! (22. ... Q×e7 23. Qh6+). Botvinnik wanted to swap down with 20. ... Bf4 21. B×f4 Q×f4 22. Q×f4 R×f4. But he saw that 23. Ne2 Ra4 24. b3! R×a2 25. Kb1 Ra6 26. R×g4+ Kh7 27. Rdg1 was unwinnable.

20. ... Nf6! 21. B×f6 Q×f6 22. R×g4+ Kh8 23. Kb1!

Avoiding 23. Rg6 Bf4!. Now on 23. ... Rab8? White has 24. Rg6! R×b2+ 25. Ka1! and wins.

23. ... Rg8 24. Rb4! a5! 25. Rb6!

"I once asked Vasily Vasilyevich what separates a world champion from a strong grandmaster," recalled Boris Postovsky, veteran Russian/Soviet team trainer. "A world champion defends slightly worse positions and, as a rule, wins slightly better ones," he replied. Here, in a battle of two champions, White defends a worse one with threats like 26. N×d5.

25. ... B×c3 26. b×c3 Rab8 27. R×b8 R×b8+ 28. Ka1 Rg8 29. Qe3 Rg4 30. a3! Re4 31. Qd3 Qe5 32. Kb2 Re3 33. Qd4 Q×d4 34. c×d4 Kg7 35. Rg1+ Kf7 36. h6! Rh3 37. Rg7+ Kf6 38. Rh7 Rh4

Black would still have winning chances after 39. c3 a4!.

39. Kc3! Rh3+ 40. Kb2 Rh4 Draw

Once again there were ugly overtones to the match. Botvinnik told interviewers he didn't experience anti–Semitism when he was younger. "Well, of course, there was veiled intrigue when I played against Smyslov — Jew against Russian," he told Gennady Sosonko. He added, "There was no anti–Semitic exclamations from the audience, my hearing is very good, but there were telephone calls, especially during the return match.... Of course, I phoned the militia from the neighbor's and the calls ceased." There was also bad blood between the players. Botvinnik said Smyslov "demanded the right" to take a fourth postponement, one more than allowed, for illness. He also said Smyslov failed to show up for a lost adjournment and "also failed to turn up for the closing of the match — a unique occurrence in the history of chess."

Stumbling Towards the Finish Line

Goldberg again proved invaluable in endgame analysis. With his help, Botvinnik outplayed Smyslov in a rook ending in the 14th game and held a commanding four-point lead. The match should have been over.

Smyslov was reeling in the next game, another Caro-Kann, and Botvinnik had a fairly routine win at adjournment. But "we demobilized," he recalled in a 1976 article after Goldberg's death. With about three minutes to play two moves and reach time control at move 56, "I got confused and then forgot about the time control and overstepped," Botvinnik wrote. "Then it became clear how my great friend Grishina was — he was in despair."

Botvinnik and Smyslov appeared exhausted as they stumbled towards the finish line. Botvinnik missed a mating combination in the 18th game but Smyslov returned the compliment three moves later. Botvinnik went on to win the game but handled the Caro-Kann badly in the next game and lost. Smyslov also won the 22nd to close to within two points. But he adjourned the 23rd game in a lost position and accepted Botvinnik's draw offer at resumption. One year and 11 days after relinquishing his title, Botvinnik had regained it. It was the first time since his 1940 training games with Ragozin that he had won a chess match, not counting the playoff of the 20th Soviet Championship.

Smyslov blamed his defeat on illness. "In the course of the match I was struck by a strong case of the flu," he recalled. His temperature reached the equivalent of 102 degrees Fahrenheit and he was taking antibiotics. When the match ended, he said, he spent the next two weeks in bed. "Why was I so ill?" he asked himself. His answer echoed Botvinnik's comment about Caissa. "Probably I angered God in some way."

11. The End of Revenge

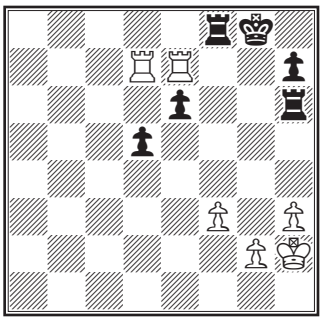
Mikhail Nekhemyevich Tal was typical of Soviet juniors of the postwar era in one way. And perhaps only one. They all grew up in an atmosphere of Botvinnik idolatry. When Tal played in a USSR junior team event in 1951, his captain "told me not to sacrifice more than a pawn in my games. He probably gave me this advice because the world chess king was a player who was not very fond of making shocking sacrifices," he said. But it was hard to follow orders. "I didn't sacrifice pawns," Tal recalled. "I simply lost them."

Tal was born in Riga, more than 500 miles from Botvinnik's Moscow, but might as well have come from another planet. He was quick-thinking, impulsive and a lover of blitz chess. Unlike Botvinnik, Tal had one profession and loved to perform in public. "Chess is my world," he said in a 1983 interview. "A world in which I lived my whole life, in which I express myself. I love the atmosphere of matches, tournaments, chess discussions. I can't imagine myself on an uninhabited island without a set and pieces, without an opponent, a Friday to play with me a match of a thousand games."

And unlike Botvinnik, Tal reveled in bad habits, including too much Scotch, vodka and, if his first wife Sally Landau can be believed, five packs of cigarettes a game. Botvinnik was self-programmed to the point of obsession, while Tal fought a losing battle with self-control. "Misha was so ill-equipped for living," Landau said. "When he travelled to a tournament, he couldn't even pack his own suitcase. We went to Paris once: I opened the suitcase, and there were only chess books, empty bottles, and dirty underwear."

Their paths crossed briefly when Tal was 12. He read in a Latvian newspaper that Botvinnik was vacationing near the Riga shore. "How could he be world champion if he hadn't played me?" he wondered. Tal said he found out the champion's address, brought a set and pieces and decided to challenge him to a game but was turned away. He first told this to journalist Viktor Vasiliev before the 1960 world championship match. Later he denied it. "Alas, I must disappoint fans of this story — it's no more than a legend." But in a 1972 article in *64* he denied the denial. He had just gone to Botvinnik's place at the wrong time. "The thing is that I (because of youth, of course) underestimated the factor of sporting regimen and came just at the time of after-lunch rest. The match was postponed," he wrote.

Tal, 24 years younger than the champion, caught his first glimpse of Botvinnik as a spectator during the 1956 Olympiad in Moscow. He got a closer look after winning the 1957 Soviet Championship, when he was added to the 1958 Olympic team as a reserve. "I was lucky to visit the famous 'home laboratory' of Botvinnik," where he witnessed him analyzing an adjourned position with Spain's Arturo Pomar. "On the board, in the opinion of the most experienced grandmasters, stood a 'dead draw.' But the tournament situation was very sharp, even the smallest chance couldn't be neglected," Tal said. "All night the analysis continued, only at six in the morning did everything become 'clear' to Botvinnik" *(diagram)*.



Botvinnik–Arturo Pomar, Olympiad, Munich 1958
After 41. Rad7

During the night it became apparent that the doubled rooks on the seventh rank weren't enough to win. Black could defend by shifting his rook between f6 and f8. Botvinnik realized that he had to trade a pair of rooks. But that wouldn't be enough. He also needed to carry out another deception. This time he would not feign despair, as he had with Euwe at Groningen. Instead, he would make it look like he was playing "pass" moves, out of obligation to his team, before he would offer a draw.

41. ... Rff6 42. Rg7+ Kh8 43. Rge7 Kg8 44. Kg1 Rf8 45. Kf2 Rff6 46. Rd8+ Rf8 47. Rd6 Rff6 48. Rb6 Kf8 49. Rd7 Kg8 50. Ra6!

Black saw that 50. ... Rf8? allows 51. R×d5 and a king move invites mate. The only defense is 50. ... Rh5, as Paul Keres pointed out.

50. ... Rhg6? 51. Ra8+! Rf8 52. R×f8+ K×f8 53. R×h7

White won in another 25 moves. In the postmortem he felt that he might also have won right after adjournment with a king march, 42. Kg1 Rf8 43. Kf2 Rff6 44. Ke3 Rf8 45. Rg7+ Kh8 46. Kd4. Black would have to try 46. ... Rg8 47. R×g8+ K×g8 48. Ke5 Rg6 49. g4 h5! and hope for 50. g×h5 Rg5+ and ... R×h5. But Botvinnik thought White would win with 50. Ra7. Tal, however, showed that 50. ... h×g4 51. h×g4 Rg7! would be enough to draw.

Botvinnik suffered his first-ever Olympiad loss in the Munich preliminaries, to Andreas Dückstein of Austria. He blamed the defeat on poor lighting. He got his revenge in the finals.

Olympiad, Munich 1958
Botvinnik–Andreas Dückstein
A29 English Opening

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. g3 d5 4. c×d5 N×d5 5. Bg2 Nb6 6. Nf3 Nc6 7. a3 Be7 8. d3 0–0 9. b4 f5!?

The threat of b4–b5 prompts a sacrifice, to avoid 9. ... a6 10. 0–0 Be6 11. Bb2 and Rc1 and Nd2–b3, when White has a small but secure edge.

10. b5 Nd4 11. N×e5 Bf6

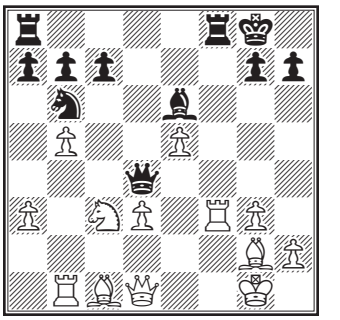
Now 12. Nf3?? N×f3+ and 13. ... B×c3+ or 12. Nc4? N×c4 13. d×c4 Nf3+!.

12. f4 Be6 13. Rb1 B×e5 14. f×e5 f4! 15. 0–0

Botvinnik recognized that 15. B×f4 would be dangerous after 15. ... R×f4! 16. g×f4 Qh4+ 17. Kd2 Q×f4+ 18. e3 Qf2+.

After the text, 15. ... f×g3 16. h×g3 R×f1+ 17. Q×f1 Nd5 is promising for Black. But he over-reaches.

15. ... f3? 16. e×f3 N×f3+ 17. R×f3! Qd4+? *(diagram)*



After 17. ... Qd4+

Black would be worse but not yet lost after 17. ... R×f3 18. Q×f3 Qd4+ 19. Qe3! Q×c3 20. B×b7 Rf8. Botvinnik finds a surprising win.

18. Re3! Q×c3 19. d4 Qc4 20. Rb4 Qa2 21. Re2 Qa1 22. d5! Rad8 23. Rd2!

Not 23. Rd4? c5! when Black is back in the game. The text forces Black into an endgame in which the center pawns will rule.

23. ... Bf5 24. Bb2! Q×d1+ 25. R×d1 Rfe8 26. Bf3 Nd7 27. e6 Nc5 28. Rf4 Bg6 29. h4! h5

There was nothing better, e.g. 29. ... Nd3 30. R×d3! B×d3 31. Rf7 Bc4 32. R×g7+ Kf8 33. Rf7+ Kg8 34. Be4. There are several ways to win now.

30. Rc4 Nd3 31. Bd4 Re7 32. Rc3 c5!? 33. b×c6 b×c6 34. Rd×d3!? B×d3 35. Bc5 Ree8 36. R×d3 c×d5 37. e7 Rd7 38. B×h5 Rd×e7 39. B×e7 R×e7 40. R×d5 Re3 41. Kf2 R×a3 42. Bg6 Kf8 43. Re5! 1–0

Treason and Malice

The Munich Olympiad came two months after Tal's spectacular win of the Portorozh interzonal confirmed his status as superstar. Before then there were two schools of thought: Pyotr Romanovsky felt Tal represented something "new in chess art. Instead of maneuvering

to prepare attack, which until now characterized players of high class, Tal advanced a fundamentally new idea — the creation of conditions of attack by means of sacrifice," he said. But some of Tal's rivals were appalled by his style. "Mark Taimanov threatened to give up chess if I won the national championship a third time in a row," Tal wrote.

Portorozh qualified Tal for the next candidates tournament. That indirectly poisoned Yuri Averbakh's close relationship with Botvinnik. Averbakh was flying home to Moscow in February 1959 from the 26th Soviet Championship in Tblisi. Tal, who had also played in Tblisi, was aboard the plane, with his second Alexander Koblents. "I have a proposal for you," Koblents said to Averbakh. "Misha and I decided to propose that you take part in his preparation for the candidates tournament and be his official second at the tournament."

Averbakh was interested. He felt he had no obligation to Botvinnik: their last training games were in early 1957. But he told the world champion of the offer to get his advice. Botvinnik didn't say a word. "I understood his silence was a sign of agreement and quickly telegrammed Riga that I accepted the offer," Averbakh recalled. "How poorly I understood Botvinnik. He took my action as treason and never proposed playing training games again."

After Tal won the candidates tournament and qualified to challenge Botvinnik in 1960, he resolved not to let the champion provoke him. In their prematch negotiations he readily accepted the duplicate-sealed-moves rule. "Why did you agree to two envelopes? You will have to write the move on two blanks in a hurry," Koblents asked, as they headed back to their hotel. But Tal wanted to deprive Botvinnik of sporting malice. He didn't succeed. "Botvinnik told me at the time of the match: This Tal is quite a good guy," recalled Flohr. "But you know, Salo, his uncle I don't like at all." In fact, Botvinnik didn't even know the uncle, Koblents wrote. By inventing an enemy to replace Tal he preserved his motivation.

Gennady Sosonko provides one footnote to the negotiations. They were conducted in the Central Chess Club's celebrated Grandmaster Room, a former drawing room with elegant furniture and a dark-red marble fireplace. Since adjourned games might be played in the room, Botvinnik inspected it. He found that the walk to the men's room was inconveniently far, so he flatly refused to have adjournments at the Club. "A compromise was found: Behind the hall where the adjournments were played in a small room was placed a special tub for the needs of the world champion," Sosonko wrote, "although wicked tongues said there was no tub, and what was used was the Hamilton-Russell Cup, awarded for victory in the Olympiad, which then had a permanent residence on the wall of the Club."

First Blood

Bobby Fischer, who had a terrible record with Tal and had never played Botvinnik, predicted the champion would "crush" the challenger. But Tal drew first blood when the match began March 15. His 32-move win as White in a Winawer Variation was so con-

vincing that Botvinnik didn't venture the French Defense again until the 12th game of their rematch. (Botvinnik lost that one, too.)

Tal nursed a one-point lead until the sixth game when he made one of his most famous sacrifices. The move, 21. ... Nf4!, had an electric effect on the audience. "The entire hall began to buzz," Koblents recalled. Arbiter Harry Golombek pressed a signal that lit up an "Observe silence" sign. But it did no good. Botvinnik's second, Grisha Goldberg, noticed a change in Botvinnik's demeanor and asked another arbiter, Gideon Ståhlberg, to transfer the game to a separate room, Koblents said. Ståhlberg was considering that request when Botvinnik blundered with his 25th move. Suddenly he was two points down.

It became three points when Botvinnik overlooked a relatively simple combination in the endgame of game seven. After the game Tal asked the match doctor to treat him for a cold. The physician also happened to be Botvinnik's personal doctor—"Against even this Tal didn't object!" Koblents said. In a friendly talk, the doctor said, "You know, Mikhail Nekhemyevich, Botvinnik is horrified. He says it's impossible to play with Tal. He knows everything and sees everything!"

But Botvinnik began a comeback when Tal botched an endgame and lost the next round. Then the champion won his best game of the match.

World Championship, Moscow 1960, ninth game
Mikhail Tal–Botvinnik
B18 Caro-Kann Defense

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 d×e4 4. N×e4 Bf5 5. Ng3 Bg6 6. N1e2 Nf6

Two previous games in the match featured 6. N1e2 and were drawn. Tal decided this was the day to spring a prepared sacrifice. Before Tal, sacrificing was considered risky unless it led to a forced, favorable result within a few moves. But Tal said risk was in the eye of the beholder: "A chess player sacrifices a piece for attack," he wrote in a celebrated article. "Does he take a risk? Of course, because the attack could be repelled." But what about his opponent? "A chess player accepts the sacrifice (even though he could decline), hoping to repel the attack. Does he take a risk? Of course, because the attack can be irresistible." "Whose risk is greater? There's no device that can measure that clearly," Tal concluded.

7. h4 h6 8. Nf4 Bh7 9. Bc4 e6 10. 0–0 Bd6!

Black can choose which sacrifice to accept. He avoided 10. ... Nd5? and 11. Qg4! Nd7 12. B×d5 c×d5 13. N×d5! e×d5 14. Re1+ Be7 15. Q×g7.

11. N×e6!? f×e6 12. B×e6 Qc7

Tal pointed out that 12. ... B×g3 13. f×g3 Bg8, to get more pieces off the board, allows 13. Qe1! with advantage after 13. ... Qe7 14. B×g8. After his next move Tal had taken only three minutes. This time Botvinnik was the one being blitzed.

13. Re1 Nbd7! 14. Bg8+! Kf8 15. B×h7 R×h7 16. Nf5 g6!

It's important to oust the knight, even at the cost of a third pawn. White would have the makings of a bind after 16. ... Kg8 17. h5! and Qf3.

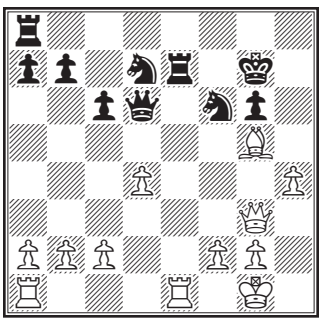
Botvinnik said 16. ... Bh2+ 17. Kh1 g6 18. B×h6+ was "less convincing" and gave 18. ... Kg8 19. g3 g×f5 20. Bf4. But Black has much better in 19. ... B×g3! 20. f×g3 g×f5, which wins.

17. B×h6+ Kg8 18. N×d6 Q×d6

Botvinnik was concerned that 18. ... R×h6 would be met by 19. Re6 R×h4 20. Qd3. But Tal pointed out that 20. ... Nf8! 21. R×f6 Qh7 wins. Both men underestimated 20. g3! and 20. ... Rh6 21. Qd2, as Khalifman pointed out.

19. Bg5 Re7

Tal was more than an hour ahead on the clock. In his splendid book on the match he recalled that after he resigned he tried to show Botvinnik "in rapid-fire succession" a series of might-have-been variations. Botvinnik who was cured of such instant evaluations more than 30 years earlier by Abram Model, thought schematically. "At first I thought that this position was better for White, but later I found the correct plan: I had to exchange rooks and keep the queens on the board," he said. Tal thought this was "rather abstract." But after looking more closely at the position "I came to the conclusion that Botvinnik was absolutely correct."



After 21. Qg3

20. Qd3 Kg7 21. Qg3? *(diagram)*

"Unquestionably the weakest move in the match," Tal wrote. He felt 21. f4 would have left him in good shape (21. ... Rae8 22. Re5!). Garry Kasparov felt 21. R×e7+ Q×e7 22. Qb3! offered equal chances, e.g. 22. ... b5 23. a4; 22. ... b6 23. Qc4; 22. ... Nb6 23. c4 Qe6 24. d5! c×d5 25. c5.

21. ... R×e1+ 22. R×e1 Q×g3 23. f×g3 Rf8!

Tal may have counted on 23. ... Re8 24. R×e8 N×e8 when he could mobilize his pawns with 25. Kf2 and Kf3 and g3–g4. But here 23. ... Rf8! 24. Re7+ Rf7 25. R×f7+ K×f7 26. Kf2 Ke6! 27. Kf3 Kf5 would halt him. Now Tal must give up the d-pawn to make kingside progress:

24. c4 Ng4 25. d5 c×d5 26. c×d5 Ndf6 27. d6 Rf7 28. Rc1 Rd7 29. Rc7 Kf7 30. B×f6 N×f6 31. Kf2 Ke6 32. R×d7 K×d7 33. Kf3 K×d6 34. Kf4 Ke6 35. g4 Nd5+

Now 36. Kg5 Kf7 37. h5 "would not have achieved anything on the kingside but after 37. ... Nb4 he would have lost both his queenside pawns," Botvinnik wrote. This is borne out by 38. h×g6+ Kg7 39. a4 Nd3 40. b3 Nc5 or 39. a3 Nd3 40. b3 a5 41. Kf5 Nc1 42. b4 a×b4 43. a×b4 Na2 44. b5 Nc3 45. b6 Na4 46. Ke5 N×b6 47. Kd6 Nc8+ 48. Kc7 b5 and wins (Kasparov).

36. Ke4 Nf6+ 37. Kf4 Nd5+ 38. Ke4 Nb4! 39. a3 Nc6 40. h5 g5! 41. h6 Kf6

Botvinnik felt Tal rushed his 41st move à la Bronstein to force him to seal his reply. Botvinnik took 42 minutes and his home analysis showed he chose correctly: 42. h7 Kg7 43. Kf5 Na5! 44. K×g5 Nc4 and then 45. h8(Q)+ K×h8 46. Kf6 Kg8 47. Ke6 N×b2 wins.

42. Kd5 Kg6 43. Ke6 Na5 44. a4 Nb3 45. Kd6 a5! 46. Kd5! K×h6 47. Kc4 Nc1 48. Kb5 Nd3 49. b3 Nc1 50. K×a5 N×b3+ 51. Kb4 Nc1 52. Kc3 Kg6 53. Kc2 Ne2 54. Kd3 Nf4+ 55. Kc2 Ne2 56. Kd3 Nf4+ 57. Kc4 Kf6 58. g3 Ne2 0–1

The outcome would be clear after 59. Kc5 N×g3 60. a5 Ne4+ 61. Kb6 Nd6 or 59. a5 Ke5 60. Kc5 Nd4 61. Kb6 Nb3.

Tal and Koblents had not only studied Botvinnik's games but had prepared a "psychological map" of the champion. In effect, they were using Botvinnik's own approach against him. The "map" apparently told them to continue to force Botvinnik to seal in difficult positions. Tal repeated his adjournment tactics in the 11th game. Again Botvinnik thought 42 minutes over his 41st move. But this time he missed an equalizer and resigned 31 moves later.

Tal added victories in rounds 17 and 19. Nine years later when Botvinnik criticized the quality of play in the Petrosian–Spassky world championship match, Boris Spassky said, "Well, he seems to have forgotten that he made more mistakes himself in his first match with Tal than either of us together."

With the score plus-three in Tal's favor, Botvinnik mentally resigned. He asked Goldberg if he should play a rematch. Goldberg was doubtful — Tal was too impressive. "It was then that I realized that the return match definitely had to be played," Botvinnik said.

Days later the match ended, 12½–8½, in the challenger's favor. The championship title had changed hands for the third time in three years.

Chess and Marx

Tal's victory was widely welcomed. "The appearance of such a wizard as Tal in the Botvinnikesque swamp was a holiday for the chess world," Spassky recalled. But Botvinnik held a different view: "With a demonic, Mephistophelian expression on his face the young Misha Tal helped spread" the myth that he had discovered a new way to play chess. No, Botvinnik concluded, his strength was due most of all to a large memory and "a greater, from the viewpoint of cybernetics and calculating technology, ability to act quickly than other grandmasters." Tal was at his best in lively positions when he could out-calculate an opponent who was in time pressure. But if the proper openings led to the correct — closed — middlegames, the Latvian could be beaten, he concluded.

While Botvinnik was planning for the second match, Tal couldn't imagine one. On a sunny day shortly after winning the title, he and Koblents were hurrying across the Moscow intersection of Lenin and Kirov streets, when Koblents stopped and asked:

"Misha, what do you think, will Botvinnik challenge you to a rematch?" "Never!" Tal replied categorically.

But on September 1, 1960, Botvinnik exercised his right to challenge him in 1961. Koblents offered to start work that day and look over the deposed champion's games. "Botvinnik games? Enough. We've already looked at them. Better that we start by looking over Keres games," Tal joked. Realizing what difficulties lay ahead, Koblents quickly left.

A month later Botvinnik played second board, for the first time on a Soviet national team, at another Olympiad. It was at Leipzig that he found a new way to improve stamina. The organizers placed a Thermos at each table, containing a drink few Russians knew — coffee. "I discovered that when I drink coffee during a game I can last five full hours," Botvinnik said. It appears that only five of his 13 games lasted that long.

Olympiad, Leipzig 1960
Botvinnik–Lothar Schmid
A43 Schmid Benoni

1. d4 c5 2. d5 d6 3. e4 g6 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Be2 Nf6 6. Nc3 Na6 7. 0–0 Nc7

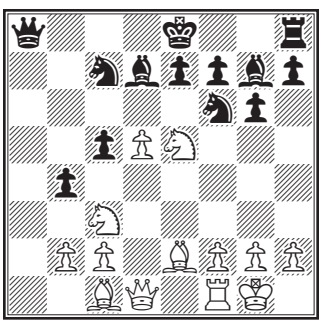
Lothar Schmid, best remembered as the arbiter of the Fischer–Spassky world championship match, had scored impressive victories with this opening. In fact, he had given his sixth move a double exclamation point because it improves over the older 6. ... 0–0 7. 0–0 a6?!, which favors White after 8. a4 Bg4? 9. Nd2!. At c7 the knight promotes ... b5. For example, 8. Bg5 h6 9. Bh4 g5 10. Bg3 Nh5 11. Qd2 0–0 12. Rad1 b5!, as one of Schmid's wins went.

8. a4 a6 9. Nd2 Bd7 10. Nc4

A Keres–Schmid game illustrated the dangers to White after 10. a5? Nb5! and 11. Ncb1 0–0 12. Bf3 Nd4. Schmid had faced 10. Nc4 in a postal game that went 10. ... b5 11. Nb6 b4! 12. N×a8 Q×a8 13. Nb1 N×e4 14. Bf3 f5 15. Nd2 Ng5! with advantage to Black.

10. ... b5 11. e5!?

Black had counted on 11. ... b×c4 12. e×f6 B×f6 but now realized 13. Bh6 would be dangerous, Botvinnik wrote.



After 14. ... b4

11. ... d×e5 12. a×b5 a×b5?

He called 12. ... N×b5 "more circumspect. But could the obstinate Lothar be expected to deviate from his intended plan?" The answer is yes if he had seen 13. N×b5 B×b5 14. N×e5 B×e2 15. Q×e2 Q×d5.

13. R×a8 Q×a8 14. N×e5 b4 *(diagram)*

White threatened 15. N×d7 and 16. N×b5. But now the d-pawn appears doomed.

15. d6! b×c3

In a later game László Szabó tried 15. ... e×d6 16. Q×d6 b×c3 and was only slightly worse after 17. Q×c7 0–0. But Hans Kmoch had pointed out that 17. Bf3! Qa6 18. Bc6 is better. And 18. Nc6! is even stronger.

16. d×c7 Qc8 17. Bf4! c×b2

A very rare case of two pawns on the seventh rank by move 17.

18. N×d7 N×d7 19. Bb5! Bd4 20. c3

This forces a won heavy-piece endgame since 20. ... B×c3 21. Q×d7+! mates.

20. ... e5 21. c×d4 e×f4 22. B×d7+ Q×d7 23. Qe2+ Kf8 24. Qe5! Kg8 25. Rb1 f6 26. Q×c5! Kg7 27. R×b2 Re8 28. Rb1 f3 29. g×f3 Qh3 30. Qc6 1–0

The only criticism of White's technique is that 23. Qa4! is faster, e.g. 23. ... Q×a4 24. c8(Q)+ or 23. ... Ke7 24. Re1+ Kd6 25. d×c5+ Kc7 26. Qa7+. It was the most impressive game played by anyone in 1960, said Tal, who had his own remarkable year. Botvinnik sat out the final round and his 80.8 percent score was easily the best of any second-board player.

After the Olympiad ended in November Botvinnik got a chance to lecture to a Western audience, at Humboldt University in Berlin, on the subject of "People and Machines at the Chess Board." He began quoting Marx and Engels on the nature of chess, adding "Probably not everyone will like this." He knew they wouldn't. Botvinnik had written on this theme for a Dutch magazine and found that he and his readers "were truly speaking 'different languages.' Those fundamentals of Marxism that every student, every schoolboy in the Soviet Union knows, seemed to my Dutch colleagues some kind of gobbledy-gook," he said.

He asked his Berlin listeners' patience as he explained: "It can be definitely asserted that chess, according to Marx, is not a science." Why? Because chess does not have scientific laws. "There is a scientific element in chess, of course, but it plays a subordinate role, as it does in art or, perhaps, sports. And no one will assert that light athletics is science." Chess can be a game or an art, he added. At one time chess was seen only as a game before the beauty of it was revealed. Now, appreciation of chess has become universal. "At the Olympiad in Leipzig 40 nations were represented! There were no representatives from Antarctica," he said. "But penguins apparently haven't learned to play chess yet."

A Champion's Health

In February 1961 Botvinnik played another round of training games, this time with Semyon Furman, Averbakh's replacement. He again set special conditions. Tal had begun to smoke at the board, not just offstage when it was his opponent's move. "Counting on a change in the 'atmospheric conditions,'" Tal said, Botvinnik asked Furman "to assiduously fumigate him" during their games.

As for Tal, his mother Ida recognized his unpreparedness. "Misha would never have lost the world championship title if he had been in jail between the matches," she said. But instead of jail, a hospital would have been appropriate. Tal was plagued by kidney disease for much of his life and in later years allegedly needed regular, often secret, injections during a game from his wife or a doctor. But his condition was in sharp dispute in the weeks before the match was scheduled to begin, on March 14.

"It got so much worse that after a careful study by an authoritative commission of doctors a decision was made: Tal will not be in condition to start the match on the appointed date," Koblents wrote. The Latvian chess federation sought to push the match starting date to April. Sports Committee was agreeable. Doctors in Riga were prepared to go further and request a two-month delay, Averbakh said. But Lev Abramov didn't want to postpone the match, for organizational reasons. "I was constantly together with Misha and, honestly speaking, the numerous calls from Abramov, asking about Tal's health, annoyed me," Koblents wrote.

Meanwhile, Botvinnik was fighting furiously with the Sports Committee against any delay. Nikolai Romanov summoned him to his office and said—"with a friendly smile" according to Botvinnik—"There's nothing to be done about it, we have to defer the match. Tal is ill." But Botvinnik demanded a doctor's certificate. Romanov replied that Tal's word was enough. "He phoned me himself," he said. But Botvinnik insisted that Tal come to Moscow to be examined by "our doctors." "We began shouting at one another," Botvinnik said. "The rules apply to everybody!" he told Romanov. "My feet will never step foot in this office again," he said as he stormed out. Once more he claimed his chess career was over.

In *Achieving the Aim*, Botvinnik defended the rematch provision by saying that without it a champion could "lose his title merely because he falls seriously ill during his match." But when Tal fell seriously ill, Botvinnik shrugged it off. ("He was ill his whole life," he said later.) On the day of Botvinnik's blowup with Romanov, Tal was asked to be examined in Moscow, and refused. Later that night Botvinnik received a phone call from a member of the match organizing committee. "The rematch will begin as scheduled," he was told.

Why did Tal suddenly declare that "doctors aren't prophets" and "could not predict how he would feel in several weeks," as Koblents put it? Perhaps because he feared that the match would be cancelled. Tal felt that "if the match is put off then it won't happen," Koblents said. So the match began on time—even though Tal suffered a minor heart attack two weeks before the first game, according to Koblents.

Rematch

Once again Tal and Botvinnik met at the Grandmaster Room of the Central Chess Club to discuss the match arrangements. Once again Tal agreed to Botvinnik's stipulations about everything, even the temperature on the playing stage. But this match was different, as Tal's incomprehensible loss in the first game showed.

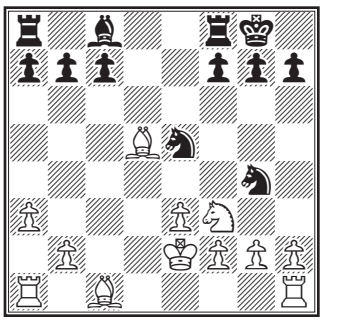
World Championship, Moscow 1961, first game
Botvinnik–Mikhail Tal
E51 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. c4 Nf6 2. Nc3 e6 3. d4 Bb4 4. e3 0–0 5. Bd3 d5 6. a3 d×c4! 7. B×c4 Bd6 8. Nf3 Nc6 9. Nb5 e5! 10. N×d6? Q×d6

Both players were aware that the only similar game, Ilivitsky–Lipnitsky, Moscow 1952, had gone 10. d×e5 N×e5 11. N×d6 N×f3+ 12. g×f3! c×d6! and then 13. Qd4 Bf5 14. Bd2 Qd7 with equal play. The difference is that without a trade of pawns, 10. N×d6 c×d6? favors White after 11. d×e5! N×e5 12. Be2 or 11. ... d×e5 12. Q×d8 R×d8 13. Ng5. Tal's move also threatens an attack, e.g. 11. 0–0 e4! 12. Nd2 Ng4 13. g3 Qh6.

11. d×e5 Q×d1+ 12. K×d1 Ng4 13. Ke2 Nc×e5 14. Bd5! *(diagram)*

Black would stand well after 14. Ba2 b6 and ... Ba6+. But now 14. Bd5 b6? is unsound after 15. N×e5! Ba6+ 16. Bc4 or 15. ... N×e5 16. B×a8! Ba6+ 17. Kd2 R×a8 18. e4.



After 14. Bd5

14. ... c6 15. Be4 Be6 16. Nd2

Behind in development, White is "clearly inferior," said Botvinnik. Nevertheless, he disdained playing for a draw with 16. N×e5 N×e5 17. f4 Bc4+ 18. Kf2 Nd3+ 19. B×d3 B×d3. But how did he turn the game around in five moves? Botvinnik and David Bronstein felt Black's next move was the culprit and he should have played 16. ... f5 and ... f4.

16. ... Rad8 17. h3 Nf6 18. Bc2 Rd7?

But Khalifman blamed his failure to play 18. ... b6! and ... Bc8–a6+.

19. b3 Rfd8 20. Rd1 Nd3?!

Khalifman also thought 20. ... Nd5 was better. But Bronstein and Botvinnik felt Black needed to force a minor piece exchange before Bb2.

Tal offered a draw here. "Objectively Black, of course, can make a draw," Bronstein wrote. "But subjectively Botvinnik was convinced of victory." He understood such positions — and he understood Tal — better than Tal did.

21. B×d3 R×d3 22. Bb2 R3d7

Otherwise 23. Bd4 traps the rook.

23. B×f6 g×f6 24. b4 Bf5

Another inexact move. If Black wants to provoke e3–e4 — so that he has a target — then 24. ... Bd5 was the way to do it.

25. Nb3! Bd3+ 26. Ke1 b6 27. Rac1 Be4 28. f3

Botvinnik reasoned that a N-vs.-B ending would be more winnable without rooks. Preserving one pair, 28. R×d7 R×d7 29. Ke2! Bd3+ 30. Kf3, was a bit better.

28. ... R×d1+ 29. R×d1 R×d1+ 30. K×d1 Bd5?

This time 30. ... Bf5 was right, so that the bishop could defend c6 from d7. White's next move threatens 32. e4! and leads to the win of a pawn.

31. Nd4! c5 32. b×c5 b×c5 33. Nb5 a6 34. Nc7 Bc4 35. Ne8 f5 36. h4 Kf8 37. Nd6 Bf1

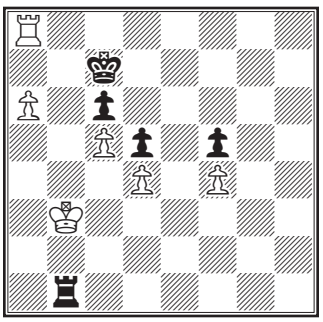
Or 37. ... Ba2 38. Kd2 Ke7 39. Nb7 c4 40. Kc3.

38. g3 Ke7 39. N×f5+ Ke6 40. e4 Ke5 41. Kd2 1–0

In their first match, the score stood three wins to two in favor of the challenger (Tal) after nine rounds. This time it was three wins to two (Botvinnik) after eight. But then Tal lost three games in a row. Botvinnik's explanation is that Tal couldn't deal with the tension and his opening preparation was a disaster. Tal scored only a half point in the first eight games as Black. And he relied on meeting 1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 with 3. e5 Bf5 4. h4!?. "You shouldn't bring one variation to a match," Botvinnik said in a postmatch press conference. He also criticized Tal's health habits. "M. Botvinnik observed further that smoking badly influences play," *Shakhmaty v SSSR* said. "With the years, the work-capability of a chessplayer-smoker sharply declines. It's not an accident that there are very few smokers among our grandmasters."

Tal belatedly returned to his favorite King's Indian Defense and won the 17th and 19th games. Botvinnik said he lost the 19th, as he had the second, because of poor adjournment analysis. Goldberg refused his invitation this time and "I couldn't find the equivalent to replace him." But Tal couldn't return to his 1960 form. Botvinnik's successors have disagreed about why. Spassky said it was because Botvinnik adopted the same strategy that Vladimir Kramnik used to defeat Garry Kasparov in 2000: Never give your opponent a chance for the initiative. Kramnik, on the other hand said, "I can't agree with the common view that Botvinnik traded queens and won.... Rather often he outplayed Tal still in the middlegame and the endgame that followed bore a purely technical character." And Kasparov thought Tal's "weak preparation and poor form" were key factors.

Tal's last stand came in the 20th game, which lasted three sessions and 121 moves. With the score 11½–7½, Tal came close to a win after the first adjournment and again after the second *(diagram)*.



Tal–Botvinnik,
World Championship,
Moscow 1961, 20th game
After 88. ... Rb1

During his second sleepless night, Botvinnik realized that White had a winning plan of (a) trading the a-pawn for the f-pawn, (b) forcing Black's king toward the passed White f-pawn and then (c) invading with his king at b6. But he found a chance to save the game with stalemate. To disguise this trick, he needed more trickery. He even deceived his oldest surviving friend in chess, Yakhov Rokhlin. When Rokhlin called that night, Botvinnik, knowing that Rokhlin talked to journalists, "gave a deep sigh" and said "Yasha, you yourself must realize how it stands." Then Salo Flohr called. But since he was "experienced and clever" — and had been burned by Botvinnik's deception in the 1951 match — Botvinnik didn't even try to hoodwink him. "I shan't say anything to you, Salomon, I'm very tired," he said. The final step was to come to the board the next day without his Thermos. The unspoken message: The game will be over shortly.

89. Ka2 Rb5 90. a7 Ra5+ 91. Kb3 Kb7 92. Rf8 Rb5+! 93. Ka4?

This is "the natural variation" Botvinnik was hoping for, designed to get the king to b6. But to win he had to engage in some misdirection first, with 93. Kc3.

93. ... K×a7 94. R×f5 Rb1

The spectators were waiting for 95. Rf7+ and then 95. ... Kb8 96. Ka5, when White is close to achieving Kb6.

95. Rf6 Kb7 96. f5 Ra1+ 97. Kb4 Rb1+ 98. Kc3 Rc1+ 99. Kd2 Rf1!

White's king cannot cross the f-file to support his pawn (100. Rf7+ Ka6 101. Ke2 Rf4 102. Ke3 Rf1) and the game was eventually drawn. But what about 95. Rf7+ ? The answer is 95. ... Ka6!. Black doesn't lose the c-pawn because the apparently winning 96. Rc7 is met by 96. ... Rb4+! 97. K×b4 stalemate.

After 14 hours and 20 minutes of play, Tal agreed to a draw. He denied that he had been taken in and said he never even noticed the absence of the famous Thermos. "Possibly, possibly," Botvinnik wrote. "Yet he could not have failed to notice my general mood of hopelessness."

He crushed Tal the next day and finished with ten wins to five losses, making it the most decisive match since the 1930s. After the game, friends tried to carry Botvinnik out of the playing site, the Estrada Theater. "No, no, I'm not a patriarch that you carry on your hands," he said. But a radio commentator dubbed him "The Patriarch" and that's the nickname that stayed with Botvinnik for the rest of his life. As for Tal, he was asked in 1988 if there was anything in his career he would have changed. "Well," he said, "Maybe I would have postponed my return match with Botvinnik after I became ill."

The Tal Effect

The Tal matches seem to have influenced Botvinnik's style. Just over six weeks after the rematch, he played in the European Team Championship in a more enterprising style. For example, he made a speculative knight sacrifice to beat Luděk Pachman, when he could have secured an edge without it. Another striking game was:

European Team Championship, Oberhausen 1961
László Szabó–Botvinnik
E44 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 b6 5. Ne2 Ne4 6. Bd2

A new move, in place of 6. f3 or 6. Qc2.

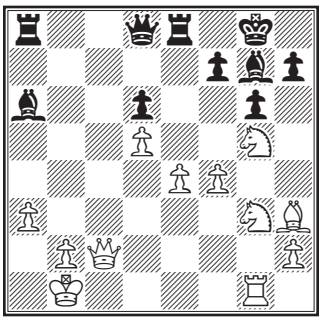
6. ... N×d2 7. Q×d2 Bb7 8. a3 Be7 9. d5 0–0 10. g3 c5?! 11. Bh3 e5 12. f4 e×f4 13. g×f4 d6 14. 0–0–0!

White has a strong attack brewing with Rhg1 and Ng3–f5.

14. ... Re8 15. Ng3 Bf8 16. Rhg1 g6 17. Nce4 Bg7 18. Ng5 Nd7 19. e4 b5!

Black is forced to try Tal-chess because of the threat of 20. e5! d×e5 and then 21. N×f7! K×f7 22. Be6+ Kf8 23. f×e5 with a strong attack. White should ignore Black's pawn offer and play 20. e5.

20. c×b5? c4! 21. Qc2 Nc5 22. Kb1



After 26. Qc2

Unclear is 22. Q×c4 Qf6 23. e5 d×e5! 24. Q×c5 e×f4 (Khalifman).

22. ... Nd3 23. R×d3! c×d3 24. Q×d3 a6! 25. b×a6? B×a6 26. Qc2 *(diagram)* **B×b2!**

White overlooked this shot (27. Q×b2 Rab8 and 27. K×b2 Qb6+).

27. Nf5 Qb6 28. Nh6+ Kf8! 29. N×h7+ Ke7 30. Ka2 Bc4+ 0–1 In view of 31. Q×c4 R×a3+ 32. Kb1 Bg7+ 33. Kc2 Qb2+.

At the end of the year Botvinnik returned to Hastings for the first time since 1935. "This time I rehabilitated myself by making a draw with Flohr and another one (in 100 moves!) with Gligorić," he wrote. He didn't have to add that he won the other seven games and finished first by two points. Andre Lilienthal said Botvinnik's decision to play in England was a way of seeking revenge after 27 years. "Botvinnik would not have been Botvinnik if he had forgotten the lessons of Hastings," he said.

Hastings 1961-62
John Littlewood–Botvinnik
B75 Sicilian Defense

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 c×d4 4. N×d4 Nf6 5. Nc3 g6 6. Be3 Bg7 7. f3 a6 8. Bc4

This was the first time Botvinnik defended with the Dragon Variation against the "Fischer Attack." He delays castling in order to deny a target to an opponent who would score impressive attacking wins in this tournament over Gligorić and Arthur Bisguier.

8. ... b5 9. Bb3 Bb7 10. Qd2 Nbd7 11. 0–0–0 Nc5 12. Kb1 N×b3 13. c×b3

This recapture discourages ... 0–0–0 because of Rc1 and allows White to play positionally, with b3–b4 and Nb3–a5, if he wants to.

13. ... 0–0 14. Bh6 B×h6 15. Q×h6 b4! 16. e5?

This is based on 16. ... d×e5? 17. Nf5 or 16. ... b×c3 17. e×f6 e×f6 18. b×c3 with advantage. Better was 16. Na4.

16. ... Nd7! 17. h4!

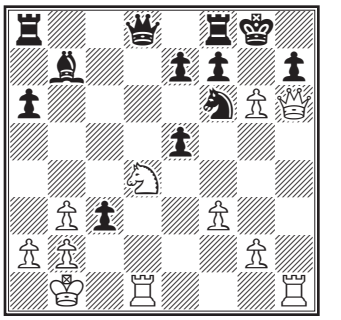
No choice now: 17. Ne4 B×e4+! 18. f×e4 N×e5 clearly favors Black.

17. ... b×c3 18. h5 d×e5! 19. h×g6

Black could have defended after 19. b×c3 e×d4! 20. R×d4 with 20. ... g5! 21. Q×g5+ Kh8 or 21. Rg4 f6.

19. ... Nf6 *(diagram)*

The British audience couldn't understand why their favorite didn't play the crushing 20. Nf5. The answer, revealed after the game, was 20. ... c2+! 21. K×c2 Qc8+ and ... Q×f5(+).



After 19. ... Nf6

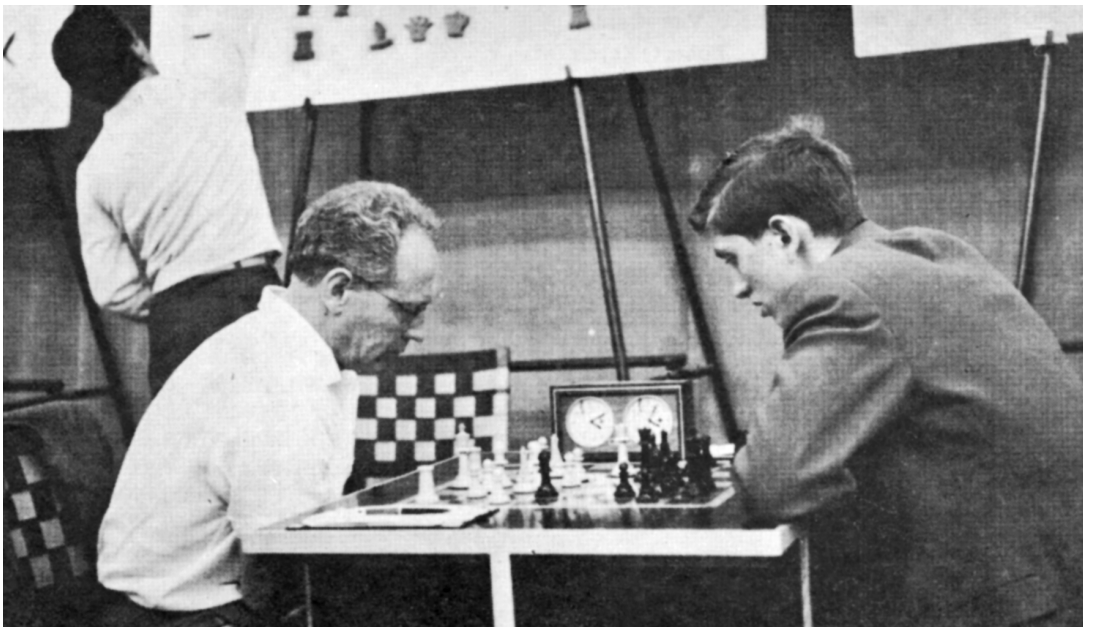
20. b×c3 e×d4

White could resign here since 21. R×d4 Qa5 22. Rf4 f×g6! 23. R×f6 R×f6 24. Q×h7+ Kf8 isn't mate. Instead, he played **21. g×h7+ Kh8** and gave up seven moves later.

From Britain, Botvinnik went to a minor international in Stockholm, where he finished 8½–½, three points ahead of second-place Flohr. The only other chess he played in 1962 was at the Varna Olympiad. He had five wins, six draws and a loss that he blamed on breaking his regimen by swimming in the Black Sea. For the second time Botvinnik earned no board prize. His brightest moment was saving, with adjournment analysis, a lost ending against what he called an "arrogant" Bobby Fischer. The crucial discovery was, however, made by Yefim Geller. Botvinnik was beginning to play like the 51-year-old he was.

The Final Match

Tigran Petrosian never wanted to be world champion, his son Mikhail said: "Mama forced him." Mikhail recalled how his father phoned their Moscow home from the Caribbean island of Curação in June 1962 to say that the candidates tournament was winding up and he wanted to draw his final rounds. Why? Because he just didn't want to play a world championship match with Botvinnik, his son said. "Mama literally insisted," Mikhail recalled. She reluctantly allowed him to offer draws. "But just don't lose — and see what happens," she told him.



As an ex–world champion, Botvinnik's most-watched game in the 1962 Olympiad in Varna, Bulgaria, was against Bobby Fischer. Botvinnik miraculously drew a rook endgame many believed was lost.

Petrosian was the stylistic antipode of Tal. Botvinnik, characteristically, thought of him as a unique form of logarithm: "Let us imagine that the computer can already play as well as a grandmaster, and that it has calculated all the variations of play and has come to the conclusion that there are two equal possibilities, offensive and defensive. Which possibility will the machine select? This of course depends not so much on the machine but on the programmer. Petrosian has 'programmed' himself for such situations long ago — he selects the defensive move where other grandmasters in analogous situations select attacking moves."

Tengiz Giorgadze, who grew up with Petrosian in Georgia, offered an explanation for his caution. Orphaned as a boy, Petrosian was so poor growing up that for a while he slept on a table at a Tblisi chess club. Poverty made him extremely careful when money was at stake, Giorgadze said. "Before a tournament Tigran always planned how many points were needed in order to avoid leaving without a prize," he said. Offering draws and minimizing risk became a way of life.

Petrosian and Botvinnik had gotten along remarkably well since their first game, in the 19th Soviet Championship, when the younger man, as White, managed a draw on the 100th move. "Mikhail Moiseyevich helped Father in every way possible," Mikhail Petrosian recalled. Why? "Because he didn't believe Papa would ever contest his championship." That changed after Curação. Tied with Keres with five rounds to go, Petrosian drew the rest of his games. Keres drew four but was upset by Pal Benko in the fifth. Petrosian — not Keres or the tournament favorites, Tal and Fischer — was the surprise challenger. He and his family soon learned about sporting malice.

Left: **Botvinnik concentrates during the fourth game of his final world championship match, against Tigran Petrosian, in Moscow in 1963.** ***Right:*** **Another scene from the same game shows Botvinnik in a familiar sight, turning to his Thermos.**

"Botvinnik had such a character. In order to get in the mood for play it was necessary to be in bad relations with his opponent," Mikhail Petrosian said. "The world champion tried in every way to bring up trifles. And Father in turn became angry." What trifles? "Botvinnik wanted to start the match in February, but Papa wanted May because in winter his ears hurt." (Petrosian was partially deaf.) Petrosian proposed April 1. Botvinnik objected because the match might last into the June heat. "For several months they couldn't agree. In the end the FIDE president Folke Rogard had enough and he simply named the date himself," Mikhail Petrosian said. Botvinnik, meanwhile, blamed the challenger for their bad blood. He said Petrosian refused to sign a prematch agreement because "they had decided to fray my nerves." When play began March 23 at the Estrada Theater, the two players were "icily polite to one another," recalled arbiter Harry Golombek. "Their only contact was a handshake."

World Championship, Moscow 1963, first game
Tigran Petrosian–Botvinnik
E35 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. Qc2

This variation had virtually disappeared in the 1940s and 1950s in part because of games like Keres–Botvinnik from the Absolute.

4. ... d5 5. c×d5 e×d5 6. Bg5 h6 7. B×f6 Q×f6 8. a3 B×c3+ 9. Q×c3 c6 10. e3 0–0 11. Ne2 Re8! 12. Ng3 g6!

Experience had shown that White gets a good game after 11. ... Bf5 12. Nf4!. Botvinnik stopped that (11. ... Re8 12. Nf4? Q×f4) and then prepared to harass the knight with ... h5–h4 when it landed on g3.

13. f3? h5! 14. Be2 Nd7 15. Kf2

Petrosian's sense of danger was intact. He avoided 15. 0–0 h4 16. Nh1 Qg5 which favors Black. But his play was listless. Later in the match his friend Giorgadze asked what had happened in the first game. Petrosian smiled. After a bit of prodding, he reluctantly said he was undone by realizing he was playing on a big stage, literally and figuratively: "When Botvinnik thought about his move I looked around the room. It was overflowing. And you know the theater holds one and a half thousand people! I was surprised and became agitated. Into my head came: Can this be Tigran, the little Tblisi kid, the orphan grown up? Is it truly me who now is trying to take the world championship from Botvinnik himself? Can these people have come to root for me? And I lost the thread of play."

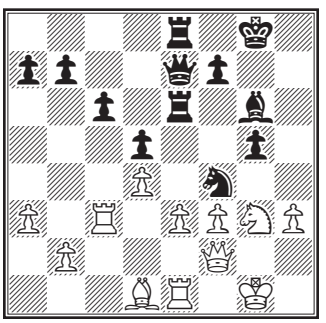
15. ... h4 16. Nf1 Nf8 17. Nd2 Re7 18. Rhe1 Bf5 19. h3? Rae8 20. Nf1 Ne6 21. Qd2 Ng7?

White had stopped ... h3 but at the cost of weaknesses that could have been punished by 21. ... Ng5! and 22. ... B×h3!. Botvinnik said he spent a long time on variations such as 21. ... Ng5 22. Kg1 B×h3 23. g×h3 N×h3+ 24. Kh1 Qg5! 25. Kh2 Qg1+! 26. K×h3 R×e3 "when it was not easy to suspect that despite his two extra pieces White is helpless."

The threat then is ... g5–g4 mate. For example, 27. K×h4 R8e4+28. f×e4 g5+ 29. Kh5 Rh3 mate or 28. Kh3 g5!. Also 27. Rac1 R8e4! 28. Rc3 Rg4! 29. Bd1 Rg3+ 30. K×h4 g5+ 31. Kh5 Rh3 mate. "This would have been the logical conclusion to the game," Botvinnik wrote. It would also have been the most dramatic opening game of a world championship match in history. But after rejecting 21. ... Ng5! he had to win it all over again.

22. Rad1 Nh5 23. Rc1 Qd6 24. Rc3 Ng3 25. Kg1 Nh5 26. Bd1 Re6 27. Qf2 Qe7 28. Bb3 g5 29. Bd1 Bg6 30. g4?

Botvinnik criticized White's sudden lurch towards complications. But he didn't mention that 29. e4!, a move before, works better, e.g. 29. ... Nf4 30. Qd2 Bg6 31. Rce3! as noted by Averbakh.



After 31. ... Nf4

30. ... h×g3 31. N×g3 Nf4! *(diagram)*

This is so strong (32. ... N×h3+; 32. ... Nd3) that White must have overlooked the pin on the e-file. Now 32. Qf1 c5! 33. d×c5 d4 is lost.

32. Qh2 c5! 33. Qd2 c4 34. Ba4 b5!

This is based on 35. B×b5 Rb8 36. Ba4 Nd3 and wins.

35. Bc2 N×h3+ 36. Kf1 Qf6 37. Kg2 Nf4+ 38. e×f4 R×e1 39. f×g5 Qe6 40. f4 Re2+! 0–1

Petrosian had covered Botvinnik's five previous matches as a *Sovietsky Sport* correspondent. He realized that six times in his championship matches Botvinnik had won two games in a row. Twice he won three games in a row. Petrosian felt this happened because Botvinnik's opponents desperately tried to recoup a lost point. So, he told himself, "Under no circumstance play to recover!"

This proved invaluable after losing the first game. He drew the next three games to get used to the idea of playing for the title. Later that year Giorgadze told this to a surprised Botvinnik. "I couldn't understand why, after the loss of the first game, Petrosian played for a draw. By logic, he should have struggled for revenge," Botvinnik said. "I regret that I couldn't see through his tactical secret. Probably it would have influenced my further play."

After the match Petrosian revealed that he didn't agree with the prevailing views of his opponent's weaknesses and strengths. "Botvinnik has remarkable combinative vision," he said, so he didn't try to beat him tactically. "On the other hand, everyone is used to the idea of the faultlessness of Botvinnik in the endgame." So that's where he would challenge him. In the fifth game Petrosian traded queens at move nine and won his first game. He took the lead by winning the seventh. And then:

World Championship, Moscow 1963, eighth game
Botvinnik–Tigran Petrosian
D27 Queen's Gambit Accepted

1. d4 d5 2. c4 d×c4 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. e3 e6 5. B×c4 c5 6. 0–0 a6 7. a4

Botvinnik stopped 7. ... b5 with this move eight times from 1930 to 1963 and drew each time.

7. ... Nc6 8. Qe2 Be7 9. d×c5 B×c5

Petrosian chose the stodgy Queen's Gambit Accepted, he said, to minimize the chance of a Botvinnik opening surprise. In addition he avoided 9. ... Ne4, which Botvinnik himself recommended some 20 years before. He was "probably feeling that any move recommended by his opponent *must* be dangerous and perhaps containing an unseen trap," Botvinnik wrote.

10. e4 Ng4

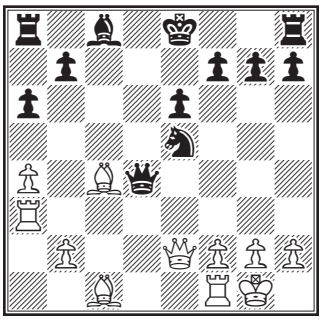
Black anticipated 11. e5! and avoided 10. ... e5? 11. B×f7+! K×f7 12. Qc4+. We are following the sixth game, which went 11. Bf4 Qf6! 12. Bg3 Nge5 with easy equality. In the five days since then Botvinnik had found an improvement and played the next three moves quickly.

11. e5! Nd4 12. N×d4 Q×d4 13. Na3!

Black sank into thought and saw that 12. ... N×e5 13. Be3! is dangerous.

13. ... B×a3! 14. R×a3

Botvinnik thought two minutes over the obvious 14. R×a3. "Psychologically, this was a terrible mistake," he said The reason is that after 13. Na3 Petrosian feared he had fallen into a trap. But Botvinnik's delayed recapture cheered him up because it indicated the champion had overlooked something.



After 14. ... N×e5

14. ... N×e5 *(diagram)*

"Here followed my second psychological and tactical error," Botvinnik wrote. He had prepared 15. b3! Qc5 16. Bb2!. It would favor White after 16. ... N×c4 17. b×c4 Bd7 18. Rg3! or 16. ... f6 17. Qh5+ g6 18. Qh6. But at the board "my intuitive sense" told him that 15. b3 didn't look right. He spent 45 minutes trying to find an alternative. He looked at 15. Rg3, 15. Ba2 and 15. Rd1 before rejecting them.

Why did he reject them? He indicated a reason when he annotated the game for the brief-lived American magazine *Chessworld* in 1964. He explained his theory that "the era of chess geniuses is past"—the time from Morphy to Alekhine, when a single player surpassed his contemporaries "because of his talent." Instead, Botvinnik wrote, "talent is no longer the deciding factor.... There are many reasons that account for defeat in an evenly matched battle, but perhaps the most significant is the player's 'form' or 'frame of mind.'" He concluded that the time before the Petrosian match was just "a period unfavorable for chess creativity" for him. In other words, the timing of the match was just unlucky.

15. b3! Qc5 16. Ra2? N×c4 17. b×c4 Bd7 18. Ba3 Qf5 19. Rd2?

Botvinnik did not comment on these moves or on the remaining 36 before he offered a draw. He was "demoralized by the unfortunate turn of events" when he failed to play 16. Bb2. Apparently he never realized how strong 19. Qb2! is. Alexander Khalifman gave a long variation that runs 19. ... 0–0–0 20. Be7 Rde8 21. Bd6! Qe4 22. Qb6 Qc6 23. Qd4!—a hard move to appreciate—f6 24. Rd2 e5 25. Qa7 Bf5 26. Rd5 and wins. In fact, the position after 18. ... Qf5 was the best middlegame Botvinnik had in the match since the first game. But the champion who had made the initiative in a bishops-of-opposite color middlegame famous had thrown the initiative away.

Yet Botvinnik managed to tie the score with superior endgame play in game 14. His relations with Petrosian deteriorated further. "He behaved quite improperly during the match," Botvinnik said, and added that the challenger's countrymen did the same by rooting excessively. "When Petrosian climbed the stairs of the Estrada Theater, the Armenians in front of him scattered sacred earth from Armenia. Well, what a way to go on. But he regarded this as being right and proper," Botvinnik told Gennady Sosonko. "If in front of me they had scattered sacred earth from Jerusalem, what would I have done? Sweep it up, and I can walk on, I would have said." He also suggested that the arbiters, Golombek

and Gideon Ståhlberg, failed to enforce the rules when Petrosian sealed what he considered an ambiguous — and therefore forfeit-worthy — move in the fifth game. He blamed his loss in the seventh game on being upset over this.

What is remarkable is that Botvinnik remained on good turns with Andre Lilienthal, who had committed two sins — helping both Smyslov and Petrosian in world championship matches against him. When asked, shortly before his death, why Lilienthal was an exception, Botvinnik grinned and said "Andrusha" was the only player who never gloated in victory. "It was impossible to harbor a grudge against him. He's almost like Jesus Christ. In chess there are no others [like him]," he said.

As the match entered its second month Botvinnik was once again running out of steam. Petrosian elegantly outplayed him in endgames of the 15th and 18th games. Botvinnik later admitted how surprised he was by his opponent. After Petrosian defeated challenger Spassky in the 1966 championship match, Botvinnik encountered Spassky on the street. He asked Spassky if he had been able to guess Petrosian's moves. Not always, Spassky replied. "I also couldn't guess," Botvinnik said.

Petrosian fell sick from something he ate after adjourning a dead-won position in the 19th game, according to Golombek. He barely won that game and the 20th had to be postponed. But it was too late to help the champion. When Botvinnik failed to win with the White pieces in game 20, he trailed by three points with four games left. Once again he signaled surrender. He drew the final two games in ten moves apiece and the match ended 12½–9½.

When *Chess Review* proposed, after World War II, that the world championship be decided in an annual tournament, Botvinnik objected. The world champion is not merely the most successful tournament player of a given year, he said. "He must bring about an epoch in chess." The Botvinnik epoch ended at 5:45 P.M. on May 20, 1963.

12. Last Moves

No world champion has played better chess after losing the title than before, despite what ratings tell us. Yet some played more enterprising chess. Dutch Grandmaster Jan Timman felt that Mikhail Botvinnik suffered from the "paralyzing realization of having achieved everything" when he became world champion in 1948. But after losing the title, "a load had been taken off his shoulders" and he developed "an energetic style which was even better than the way he played just after the war."

Botvinnik offered his own explanation: In the Petrosian match "I played under unusually great pressure and tension." But with no rematch to prepare for, he felt free to play more. "Three months after the Championship match I once again sat down to play, and what happened? There was no tension."

Soviet Team Championship, Moscow 1963
Mark Taimanov (Leningrad)–Botvinnik (Moscow)
E43 Nimzo-Indian Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 c5 5. Nf3 b6 6. Bd3 Bb7 7. 0–0 0–0 8. Na4 Qe7!?

White's eighth move threatened 9. a3 and was usually met by 8. ... c×d4, which improves White's center after 9. e×d4. Botvinnik prepared the novelty 8. ... Qe7 for the Petrosian match but never got to use it.

9. a3 Ba5 10. b3!

Petrosian, who was also playing in the tournament, asked Taimanov after the game why he didn't play 10. d×c5 b×c5 11. N×c5 Q×c5 12. b4. That made positional as well as tactical sense because 12. ... B×b4 13. a×b4 Q×b4 could be punished by 14. Rb1 or 14. Ba3. Taimanov replied that 12. ... B×f3! "would have been awfully unpleasant." That was the trap Botvinnik devised: 13. Q×f3 Qe5 14. b×a5 Q×a1 15. Q×a8 Qc3 and Black is at least equal. He was cheered to know he had prepared well for Petrosian — but "was not very lucky" in the match, he said.

10. ... d5 11. c×d5 e×d5 12. Bb2 Nbd7 13. Qe2 Ne4 14. Rac1 Bc6!

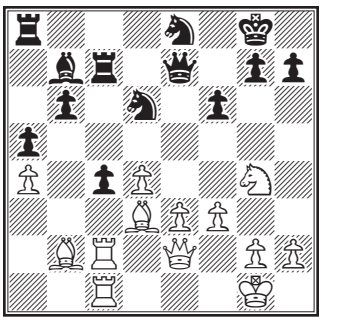
White had tried to embarrass the bishop on a5 but now it's his knight that's threat-

ened by ... B×a4 or ... c4. For example, 15. Bb5 B×b5 16. Q×b5 a6 17. Qe2 c4!. Black has the upper hand (18. b×c4 d×c4 19. Q×c4 b5 20. Qd5 Nef6! 21. Qf5 g6 22. Qg5 h6 23. Q×h6 b×a4).

15. Nc3 B×c3! 16. B×c3 a5 17. Bb2 Rfc8

Black avoids opening up the position prematurely because 17. ... a4 18. d×c5! b×c5 19. b4 favors White.

18. Ne5! Bb7! 19. Rfd1 Ndf6 20. f3 Nd6 21. a4 Rc7 22. Rc2 Nfe8 23. Rdc1 f6 24. Ng4 c4! 25. b×c4 d×c4 *(diagram)*



After 25. ... d×c4

Botvinnik saw he would be winning after 26. B×c4+ R×c4 27. R×c4 Ba6! but White would have compensation after 26. R×c4! N×c4 27. R×c4. "However, my opponent was so crushed by the fact that he had overlooked 24. ... c4 that he became pensive and made a move that proved poor in the long run."

26. Be4? N×e4 27. f×e4 Q×e4 28. R×c4?

Necessary was 28. h3 so the knight can retreat to h2. Taimanov must have overlooked Black's 30th move.

28. ... R×c4 29. Q×c4+ Bd5 30. Qe2 h5! 31. Ne5 f×e5 32. d×e5 h4

White played until adjournment and resigned.

As champion, Botvinnik had managed to sidestep Soviet team events. But as ex-champion he played in 16 of them over five years, scoring an impressive 51½–20½. Remarkably, 18 of his games are missing — even from Alexander Khalifman's collection of 1,164 Botvinnik games — and apparently lost. Others, like this one, are missing from some databases.

Moscow Trade Union Championship 1965
Vasily Smyslov–Botvinnik
A22 English Opening

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. g3 Bb4 4. Bg2 0–0 5. d3 Nc6

Black's last move was apparently an innovation.

6. Bd2 Re8 7. e4 Nd4 8. a3 Bc5 9. b4 Bf8 10. Nge2 N×e2 11. N×e2 c6 12. 0–0 d5!? 13. e×d5 c×d5 14. Bg5! Be6! 15. c×d5

Black would have been a bit worse after 14. ... d4 15. f4! or 14. ... d×c4 15. d×c4. Smyslov now seeks to double enemy pawns instead of 15. Nc3!, which favors him after 15. ... d×c4? 16. B×b7 Rb8 17. Bc6.

15. ... B×d5 16. B×f6 g×f6 17. B×d5 Q×d5 18. Nc3 Qe6

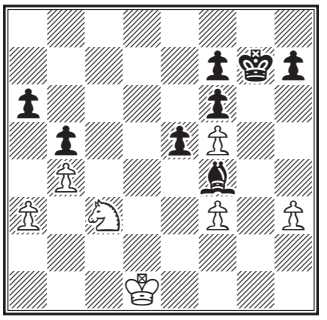
Some computers routinely rate positions like this as better for White because of the doubled pawns. They don't appreciate how Black's position can improve much more easily than White's, such as from ... f5 or the doubling of rooks against d3.

19. Qf3 Rad8 20. Rfd1 b6 21. g4!? Bh6 22. Qf5

The endgame is no more than equal. But 22. Ne4 Bf4! would allow Black to play for an edge with ... f5 or ... Kh8 and ... Rg8.

22. ... Rd4 23. Ne4 Q×f5 24. g×f5 Red8! 25. Kf1!

Smyslov recognized that 25. N×f6+ Kf8 would favor Black after ... Ke7 and ... R×d3 (and would lose after 26. N×h7+? Kg7).



After 33. ... a6

25. ... R×d3 26. Ke2 R3d4!

Trading rooks, 26. ... R×d1 27. R×d1 R×d1, allows 28. N×f6+ Kg7 29. Nh5+!.

27. R×d4 R×d4 28. f3

The difference is 28. N×f6+ Kg7 29. Nh5+ Kf8 and Black threatens both ... Rd2+ and ... Rh4.

28. ... Bf4 29. Rg1+ Kf8 30. h3 b5 31. Rd1 R×d1 32. K×d1 Kg7 33. Nc3 a6 *(diagram)*

The first Botvinnik–Smyslov game, 25 years before, was a drawn N-vs.-B ending. That was prophetic: Eighteen of their 100+ games became N-vs.-B battles, in the late middlegame or ending. The knight won six times, four by Botvinnik. The bishop won six times, four by Smyslov.

Smyslov later showed that White can draw with 34. Nd5! Kh6! 35. N×f6 Kg5 36. N×h7+ K×f5 37. Nf8 e4 38. Nd7! and now 38. ... e×f3 39. Ke1 Ke4 40. Nc5+ Kd5 41. N×a6 Bc1 42. h4! B×a3 43. h5 because one of the Black pieces must stop the h-pawn.

34. Ne4? Be3! 35. Kc2 Bd4 36. Nd6 Kh6! 37. Ne4 Kh5! 38. N×f6+ Kg5 39. N×h7+ K×f5 40. h4 Be3 41. Nf8 0–1

The game was not resumed in view of 41. ... Kf4 42. Nd7 Bd4! and the bishop dominates the knight. For example, 43. Nf6 K×f3 44. Kd3 Kf4 45. Nd5+ Kg4 46. Nc7 f5 47. N×a6 f4 48. Nc7 f3 49. N×b5 Kh3 and the f-pawn queens. Or 43. h5 K×f3 44. Kd3 f5 45. h6 Ba1 46. h7 e4+.

Botvinnik Abroad

Before 1961 Botvinnik accepted only six invitations to play in non–Communist Europe. From 1965 to 1969 he entered seven tournaments and won four of them. In contrast,

his old rivals were generally not allowed to play outside the Warsaw Pact group of nations. Andre Lilienthal naively believed his lack of opportunities had something to do with national security. "My uncle, David Lilienthal, an atomic scientist, was head of the atomic committee in America," he said in one of his last interviews. "And they stopped letting me out of the USSR to tournaments." (David Lilienthal, whose parents were Hungarian Jews, was indeed head of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission — but only until 1950. And there is no indication of a family connection to the grandmaster.)

Botvinnik used his authority in ways that other Soviet players could not. For example, at the 1964 Olympiad in Tel Aviv, the USSR team was seeded into a preliminary group along with South Africa. Soviet officials wanted to boycott the match as a protest against apartheid. Botvinnik announced, "If you make such a decision I will go to play alone." The entire team played and scored a 4–0 sweep. Two rounds later he became annoyed when his opponent, Antonio Medina of Spain, began to whistle at the board. Botvinnik complained to the Spanish team captain. That was a bad sign, he said. "If Medina starts whistling it means his position is hopeless." Botvinnik won in 41 moves.

Without the burden of being on first board he had less responsibility and could take liberties, as in what he called this "jolly" game.

Olympiad, Tel Aviv 1964
Izak Aloni–Botvinnik
E71 Benoni Defense

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5!? 3. d5 g6 4. Nc3 d6 5. e4 Bg7 6. h3 0–0 7. Be3 e6 8. d×e6?! B×e6 9. Nf3 Qa5 10. Qd2 Nc6 11. Be2 Nd7! 12. 0–0 Nde5

Botvinnik sized up his opponent as an aggressive player who would not want to defend after 13. Q×d6 N×f3+ 14. B×f3 B×c4 15. Rfd1 Nd4.

13. N×e5 d×e5!

Not 13. ... N×e5 14. Q×d6 N×c4 15. B×c4 B×c4 16. Rfd1 because he wanted to see how his opponent would handle a symmetrical position. This approach paid off a month before against Leonid Stein who faced 1. c4 g6 2. Nc3 Bg7 3. d4 Nf6 4. e4 0–0 5. Be3 d6 6. f3 b6 7. Bd3 Bb7 8. Nge2 c5 9. 0–0 Nc6 10. Bc2 e5 11. d×e5 d×e5 12. Bg5 h6 13. Bh4 Nd4 14. Nd5. Stein rejected 14. ... Qd6 and lost after 14. ... N×d5? 15. B×d8 Ne3 16. Qd3 Ra×d8 17. Q×e3.

14. Rad1 Nd4 15. Bd3? B×h3!

White rejected the dead-even 15. Nd5 Q×d2 endgame. He may have wanted to play 15. Bh6 but saw that it fails to 15. ... N×e2+! 16. N×e2 Q×d2. His next move is based on 16. b4 Q×b4 17. Rb1 and R×b7.

16. b4! c×b4 17. Nd5 Bg4 18. Rb1 Qd8?

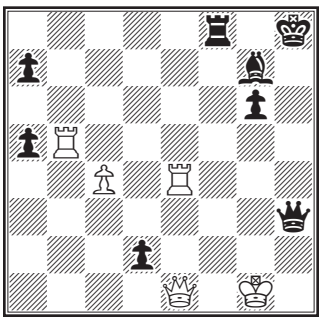
Black wanted to avoid 19. a3! but 19. ... Nc6 was superior.

19. B×d4! e×d4 20. R×b4 b6 21. a4! f5 22. e×f5 B×f5 23. a5 b×a5!

Another psychological decision, Botvinnik admitted. White is two pawns down and lured into getting one back with 24. Rb5. But 24. Rb7! was better in lines such as 24. ... Qh4 25. g3 Qg4 26. Kg2! and Rh1 and Ne7+.

24. Rb5?! B×d3 25. Q×d3 Qh4 26. g3 Qg4

Now the 27. Kg2 idea invites 27. ... Rf7 with the idea of 28. ... Raf8.



After 35. ... h×g6

27. Re1 Rf3 28. Qb1 Raf8 29. Re4 R×g3+!

Black is forced to sacrifice, since 29. ... Qh3 loses to 30. Ne7+ Kh8 31. N×g6+ h×g6 32. Rh4+. White likely expected perpetual check.

30. f×g3 Q×g3+ 31. Kh1 d3! 32. Ne7+ Kh8 33. Qe1 Qh3+ 34. Kg1 d2! 35. N×g6+ h×g6 *(diagram)*

Now 36. Rh4+ Kg8! leads to mate.

36. Qh4+ Kg8! 0–1

So does this: 37. Q×h3 d1(Q)+ 38. Kh2 Rf2+ 39. Kg3 Qg1+ 40. Kh4 Bf6+ 41. Rg5 Q×g5 mate. Or 37. Rb1 Qd3!. Botvinnik added a footnote: When he was touring West Germany in 1973 a group of chessplayers in Solingen "decided to test my memory" by showing him a demonstration board depicting the final position. "I sensed the position was very familiar but initially I could not remember it." The reason, he said, is that he was Black in the game and did not recognize it from the White side.

Botvinnik's team clinched gold medals with a round to go so he sat out the final match. His 9–3 score meant that his Olympic career ended with 39 wins, 31 draws, 3 losses and a 74.6 percent score. For comparison: Tal's Olympiad record was 81.2 percent, Kasparov's was 78.7 percent and Fischer's was 75.4 percent. Botvinnik also garnered two gold, one silver and two bronze medals as board prizes.

Botvinnik's playing career was gracefully winding down. Yet as late as February 1965 he hoped for one more championship match. Petar Trifunović, who finished second to him at the Noteboom Memorial at Nordwijk aan Zee that month, indicated that Botvinnik thought FIDE might order a rematch before Petrosian played his 1966 challenger. "Botvinnik says he would very much like to play a return match with Petrosian and that he is not without chances," Trifunović wrote. It was not to be. Instead, Botvinnik would try to realize his dreams for reaching the top again through his students and his computer program.

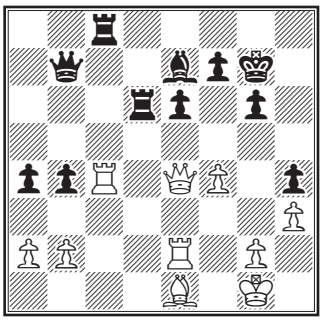
The Botvinnik School

Grigory Ravinsky, his old Leningrad opponent, had become a trainer of juniors at the Central Chess Club and suggested that Botvinnik give lessons to the very best young

Soviet players. But he couldn't replicate his weekly, prewar classes at the Leningrad Pioneer Palace. The best students in 1963 were spread across the vast country. Anatoly Karpov, 12, lived in the Urals, for example, and Yuri Balashov, 14, was in Siberia.

The solution was creating an "all-union children's school," organized by Grisha Goldberg, who headed chess work in the Trud sports society. Goldberg "convinced me to meet with kids three–four times a year," under Trud's auspices, Botvinnik said. At these meetings he gave classes and simultaneous exhibitions with clocks. He said he recalled two games, a loss to Balashov as Black in a Grünfeld Defense, and this *(diagram)*:

Karpov–Botvinnik,
Moscow 1964
After 38. Qe4



He played 38. ... R×c4??, overlooking 39. Q×b7. Botvinnik said he "nevertheless managed to draw" the game, which went 39. ... Bf6 40. B×b4?? Bd4+ 41. Kh1 Rb6! 42. Qe7 Rc×b4 draw. He was apparently being disingenuous. "Immediately after noticing the blunder of the simul-giver I proposed through a master-assistant that Botvinnik take back the move," Karpov recalled. "He refused and then, not wanting to receive an 'illegal' point, I intentionally made a mistake, leading the game to a draw."

Karpov was in the first class of six boys and one girl. He said his relationship to chess changed after the very first session. But Botvinnik treated him "coolly" and "announced that I had no big prospects." Karpov grew up in a region where chess books were scarce and lacked opening knowledge. Botvinnik failed to appreciate that this meant "I had gotten used since childhood to defending difficult positions."

The school failed after 18 months for lack of support. But Goldberg managed to revive it in 1969. The format he and Botvinnik devised was to have three face-to-face sessions with students each year, near Moscow in February and May and then again during the summer at the Orlyonok (Eaglet) Young Pioneer camp on the Black Sea. In between sessions it functioned as a correspondence school. Botvinnik would assign homework, such as analyzing particular endgames or openings.

His star pupil was Garry Kasparov. In August 1973, Alexander Nikitin, who was looking for candidates for the school, arranged for the 10-year-old Baku boy to attend one of the sessions and, as Kasparov put it, "I passed the rigorous examination and was enrolled in the school." Botvinnik was particularly impressed three years later when Kasparov refuted Fischer's analysis and showed that the American did not have a win in a crucial position of his game with Botvinnik at Varna 1962. By the time Kasparov had become a world-class player he joined his former teacher in what was known as the "Kasparov-Botvinnik" school.

But even then "Botvinnik himself did all of our training," said Vladimir Kramnik. He was admitted to the school after his parents wrote to Botvinnik as their present to him on his 11th birthday. Kramnik recalled how a session worked: Each of the students would show off four of his or her games, ideally two wins, a draw and a loss. Botvinnik and Kasparov would add their own comments. The next two days would be devoted to six-board Kasparov simuls. Then came two training games at a slow control. The Patriarch seemed impressed by Kramnik. "He liked that even in childhood years I loved to go into the endgame. He was simply in ecstasy over that," Kramnik said.

Although Botvinnik had been slow, years before, to recognize the ability of women such as Nona Gaprindashvili, talented young girls were also recruited to his school. Anna Akhsharumova was Botvinniks' favorite female student, according to her husband Boris Gulko. When Botvinnik learned that Gulko and his wife intended to emigrate, he went to the Central Committee and said, "Under no circumstance can Anya Akhsharumova leave. She can become women's world champion."

His students often had sharply different views of his teaching. Kasparov, for example, was deeply impressed by him. "Botvinnik's wisdom lay in the fact that he never tried to overwhelm us with his authority," Kasparov wrote. "He never tried to impose his own style on his pupils. But Karpov said, "Botvinnik took himself too seriously. He was too much the world champion, too much the celebrity."

Lev Psakis recalled how his own brief enrollment in the school came to a crashing end. He "left in disgrace" after a day devoted to training games. "My sparring opponent was some girl who I outplayed with Black," he recalled. Then as White, after 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. N×e5 d6, he played the highly speculative 4. N×f7!?. "If it had not been the Botvinnik school but the Tal this would have been met with understanding," he wrote. "I think that having taken the pawn I signed my own sentence, and they stopped inviting me to sessions," said Psakhis. Nevertheless he went on to win two Soviet Championships by the time he was 23.

Alexander Beliavsky never attended the school but after winning the world junior championship in 1973, he said, "Mikhail Moiseyevich studied with me nearly as much as with his students." He was invited to Botvinnik's "rather modest" apartment, about 60 square yards in three rooms and a kitchen, on Moscow's 3rd Frunze Street. Botvinnik was still using a 1930s chess set, with most of the pieces chipped, he said. "Botvinnik welcomed me very warmly, treated me to dinner. Then we sat down to go through my games and the ex–world champion criticized my play utterly. As a result, every time I left Botvinnik in tears, with the thought that I understand nothing about the game and will never learn to play chess well."

The Last Tournaments

Botvinnik often said he knew only one way to play chess. Yet he spent his final playing years experimenting with radically different openings and pawn structures. He all but dropped his favorite French Defense and Stonewall Dutch and tried 1. g3 as White.

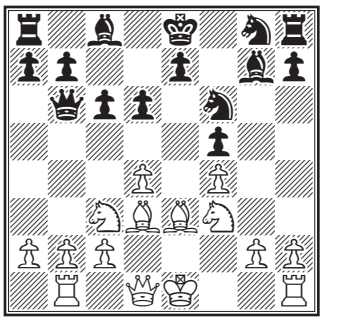
Moscow Trade Union Championship 1966
Mikhail Yudovich–Botvinnik
B06 Modern Defense

1. e4 g6 2. d4 d6 3. Nc3 c6 4. f4 Bg7 5. Be3 Qb6!

Databases indicate 5. Be3 was a novelty. Botvinnik's threat of 6. ... Q×b2 points out the drawback.

6. Rb1 f5! 7. Nf3?! Nd7

White missed his chance for a promising gambit, 7. e5! d×e5 8. f×e5 B×e5 9. Nf3, with good compensation. But now 8. e5 d×e5 9. f×e5 N×e5 10. N×e5 B×e5 11. Na4 Qa5+ favors Black.



After 9. ... Ndf6

8. e×f5 g×f5 9. Bd3 Ndf6 *(diagram)*

Black handles the opening with great originality. He plans ... d5 and ... Ne4!. If White captures the knight, ... f×e4 will free f5 for his remaining knight and prepare decisive pressure along the g-file.

10. Qe2 Nh6 11. h3 Bd7 12. 0–0 Qc7 13. Ng5 d5! 14. Bd2 Qd6 15. Kh2 Ne4 16. Nf3 Qg6

Now 17. Be1 safeguards g3 but Black would follow with a strong and simple ... 0–0–0, ... Bf6, ... Rdg8–7 and ... Rhg8.

17. B×e4 f×e4 18. Ne5 B×e5! 19. d×e5?

A better defense was 19. f×e5! and Qf2 and Ne2.

19. ... Nf5 20. Qf2

White's 19th move prepared 20. g4 but Botvinnik was ready to meet that with 20. ... Nd4 21. Qe3 Nf3+ 22. R×f3 e×f3 23. Q×f3 Q×c2.

20. ... h5! 21. b4 Rg8 22. Rg1 h4!

The decides the game positionally and creates the tactical options of 23. ... e3 24. B×e3 Qg3+ or tripling on the g-file.

23. Be1 Kf7! 24. b5 Rg7 25. b×c6 B×c6 26. Ne2 e3 27. Qf1 Rag8 28. g4

Otherwise Black wins with 28. ... d4 and ... B×g2.

28. ... h×g3+ 29. B×g3 d4 30. Rb4 N×g3 31. R×g3 Q×c2 32. R×g7+ R×g7 0–1

As he aged, Botvinnik was beginning to make more outright blunders. In the Soviet Trade Union Championship of 1966 he crushed Paul Keres in 27 moves, outplayed Boris Spassky and won another great battle with Smyslov. But in his final game, in a very

favorable ending with Petrosian, he allowed a two-move win. Two months later at Hastings he hung a rook against Raymond Keene. At Palma de Mallorca 1967 he lost a two-pawn-up middlegame to Mato Damjanović.

But he could also "win in the style of the old masters," as he put it in *Analytical.* "For this you need your opponent to be in the wrong frame of mind and psychologically not ready for battle."

Monte Carlo 1968
Botvinnik–Lajos Portisch
A29 English Opening

1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. g3 d5 4. c×d5 N×d5 5. Bg2 Be6 6. Nf3 Nc6 7. 0–0 Nb6 8. d3 Be7 9. a3 a5 10. Be3 0–0 11. Na4

This last move is familiar with colors reversed. A Sicilian Dragon–like response would be 11. ... Nd5! 12. Bc5 Bd6.

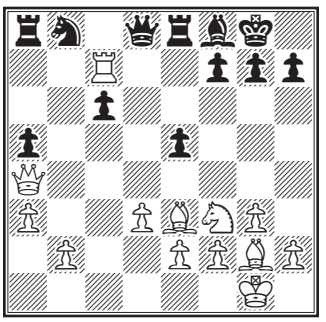
11. ... N×a4 12. Q×a4 Bd5 13. Rfc1 Re8 14. Rc2 Bf8?!

Black has to start thinking about how he will defend his b- and c-pawns. In the post-mortem, Smyslov pointed out 14. ... Bd6 15. Qb5 Ne7!.

15. Rac1 Nb8?

One annotator called this a "mouse trap" defense. After 16. R×c7 Bc6 the rook that was lured in can't escape. Portisch's move prepares to solve his queenside problems with ... c6 and ... Nd7.

16. R×c7! Bc6 17. R1xc6!



After 17. ... b×c6

"This is what Portisch underestimated!" Botvinnik wrote in *Ot Shakhmatista k Mashinye*, which appeared in English as *Selected Games 1967–1970*. Black had counted on 17. R7xc6 N×c6 when White's compensation is insufficient (18. Nd2 Nd4!).

17. ... b×c6 *(diagram)*

Botvinnik wrote that Portisch overlooked 18. Rb7. That seems to indicate that Botvinnik intended to play that move but realized that it favors Black after 18. ... Qc8 19. Qb3 Nd7 20. Ng5 Re7.

18. R×f7! h6

The game deserved a 19th century finish, 18. ... K×f7 19. Qc4+ Kg6 20. Qg4+ Kf7 21. Ng5+ Kg8 22. Qc4+ and a smothered mate. No better was 19. ... Re6 20. Ng5+ or 19. ... Qd5 20. Ng5+.

19. Rb7 Qc8 20. Qc4+ Kh8

Botvinnik didn't think 20. ... Qe6 was worth analyzing. White would win a fourth pawn after 21. N×e5 Q×c4 22. N×c4 a4 23. Bf4. After 20. ... Kh8 White could try 21. Rb6, 21. Rf7 or 21. Qf7. For example, 21. Rf7 prepares 22. Nh4 and invites 21. ... Bd6 22. B×h6! g×h6 23. Qe4.

21. Nh4! Q×b7 22. Ng6+ Kh7 23. Be4! Bd6 24. N×e5+ g6

Or 24. ... Kh8 25. Nf7+ Kg8 26. N×d6+.

25. B×g6+ Kg7 26. B×h6+! 1–0

White wins the queen after 26. ... K×h6 27. Qh4+ Kg7 28. Qh7+.

Monte Carlo 1968 was one of Botvinnik's last tournaments in which he achieved a performance rating over 2700. His final one was Wijk aan Zee 1969, where he tied for first with Yefim Geller, drew with the next nine players in the final scoretable and beat the six tailenders. But he missed an opportunity to win what would have been one of his finest games:

Wijk aan Zee 1969
Botvinnik–Lubomir Kavalek
E90 Benoni Defense

1. c4 g6 2. d4 Bg7 3. Nc3 c5 4. d5 d6 5. e4 Nf6 6. Bd3 0–0 7. h3 e6 8. Nf3 e×d5 9. e×d5! Re8+ 10. Be3

Botvinnik said his last move was the key to a system he had heavily prepared. It improves on 9. c×d5 b5! 10. B×b5 N×e4! 11. N×e4 Qa5+.

10. ... Bh6 11. 0–0! B×e3 12. f×e3 Qe7

Actually, Archil Ebralidze, many-time champion of Tblisi, had done all this as White in 1955. White would get good play for the pawn after 12. ... R×e3 13. Qd2 and Ng5. The move 10. Be3 became famous after Botvinnik played it against Milan Matulović at Palma de Mallorca 1967.

13. e4 Nbd7 14. Qd2 a6 15. Rf2 Ne5?

Black rejected the solid, passive 15. ... Rf8 followed by ... Ne8! and ... f6 in order to get quick play on the dark squares. But he makes an oversight.

16. N×e5 Q×e5 17. Raf1 Nd7 18. R×f7 Qd4+ 19. Kh1!

Avoiding 19. R7f2? Ne5 20. Rd1 B×h3! (21. g×h3?? Nf3+).

19. ... Ne5 20. Qf4! B×h3!

White had threatened 21. Rf8+. Botvinnik said Black had intended 20. ... Bf5 but now realized 21. R×b7! N×d3 22. Qh6 would be a decisive attack.

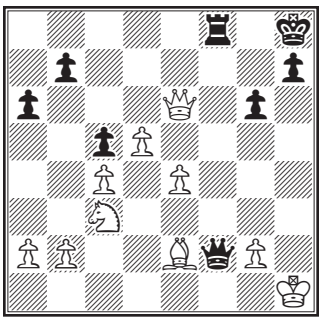
21. Be2 Bd7 22. Qf6?

Botvinnik begins to spoil a pearl of home analysis. He said he wanted to play 22. Rf6 but didn't like 22. ... Kg7 and 23. Rd1 Rf8! 24. R×d4 R×f6. He couldn't explain why, during his 20 minutes' think, he didn't see that 23. R×d6! Rf8 and 24. Rf6! would win. Nevertheless, the move he played forces the win of two pieces for a rook.

22. ... N×f7 23. Q×f7+ Kh8 24. Q×d7 Rf8 25. Q×d6

A younger Botvinnik might have gone into the favorable 25. Rf7 R×f7 26. Q×f7 Qg7 27. Q×g7+ ending.

25. ... R×f1+ 26. B×f1 Qf2 27. Qe5+ Kg8 28. Qe6+ Kh8



After 31. ... Rf8

Botvinnik thought he had thrown away his chances because Black's king is safe after 28. ... Kg7! 29. Qd7+ Kh6. True, but White can still play for a full point with 30. Be2 and 31. d6 as in the game.

29. Qe5+ Kg8 30. Qe6+ Kh8 31. Be2 Rf8 *(diagram)*

Here is where the final error was made. White can win with 32. d6! since 32. ... Rf4 and the threat of ... Rh4+ is met by 33. Bg4 Qh4+ 34. Bh3 Rf1+ 35. Kh2 Qf4+ 36. g3 Rf2+ 37. Bg2 or 36. ... Qf2+ 37. Bg2 Qg1+ 38. Kh3 Rf2 39. Qe5+ Kg8 40. Qd5+! Kg7 41. e5! and wins.

32. Qe5+ Kg8 33. Bg4 Qh4+ 34. Bh3 Qe1+ 35. Kh2 Rf1! 36. Be6+ Kf8 37. Qh8+

Another tournament participant, Pal Benko, said that 37. Qd6+ Kg7 38. Qe7+ Kh8 would lead to a perpetual check. Botvinnik added "38. ... Kh6 39. Kh3! Rh1+ 40. Kg4" and indicated White is winning. But the embarrassing 39. ... g5! would have won for Black, as Khalifman showed.

37. ... Ke7 38. Q×h7+ Kf6 39. Qh8+ Kg5 40. Qe5+ Kh6 41. Qh8+ Kg5 42. Qd8+ Kh5 43. Qh8+ Draw

Botvinnik said he had decided in the winter of 1969 to give up tournament play within a year. This should have made his final events more meaningful. But he felt less incentive, not more. He finished only seventh at Belgrade 1969, which was dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the ousting of the Nazis in World War II. The field was so strong that his performance rating was a creditable 2653. He played one impressive game.

Belgrade 1969
Botvinnik–Predrag Ostojić
A42 King's Indian Defense

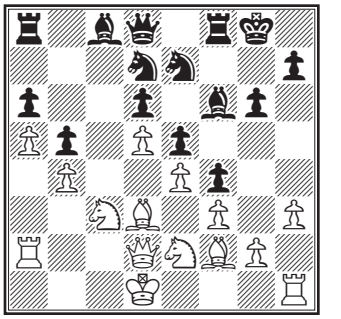
1. c4 g6 2. e4 Bg7 3. d4 d6 4. Nc3 Nd7 5. Be3 e5 6. d5 Ne7 7. Bd3 0–0 8. f3!

Converting to a Sämisch setup is best because it leaves at least one Black knight misplaced.

8. ... f5 9. Nge2 Nf6 10. Qd2 c6 11. h3 c×d5 12. c×d5 f4 13. Bf2 a6 14. a4

It's a cat and mouse game on both wings: White avoids 0–0 because 14. ... g5! and a favorable ... h5 and ... g4 could not be stopped. He hints that he will play on the queenside, with a4–a5, and castle short later.

14. ... b6 15. b4 Nd7 16. a5! Bf6 17. Ra2 b5? 18. Kd1! *(diagram)*



After 18. Kd1

Surprise. Black closed the queenside as best he could, assuming he would get good kingside play after the inevitable 0–0. But now White's king finds sanctuary around b1 and he will be the one to open the kingside favorably.

18. ... Rf7 19. Kc1 Qc7 20. Kb1 Qb7 21. Rc1 Nf8 22. Bc2! Bd7 23. Bb3 Kg7 24. Rac2 Ng8 25. Nd1! Bd8 26. Nb2 Nf6 27. Nd3 Ne8

Each of White's pieces except the queen has found a good square and he is nearly ready to open the kingside with g2–g3.

28. h4 h6 29. Qd1 Rc8 30. Qg1! R×c2 31. R×c2 Bc8 32. g3! f×g3 33. Q×g3 Nf6 34. Qg2! Nh5 35. Ng3 N×g3

The thematic move 35. ... Nf4 is tactically bad after 36. N×f4 R×f4? 37. Nh5+ and positionally bad after 36. ... e×f4 37. Ne2 and Nd4!.

36. Q×g3 Rc7 37. f4! R×c2 38. B×c2 e×f4 39. Bd4+ Kh7 40. Q×f4 Qe7 41. e5 d×e5 42. B×e5 Nd7 43. Bb2

White's winning ideas include h4–h5, Nc5–e6 and d5–d6.

43. ... Qf8 44. h5! Q×f4 45. N×f4 Kg8 h×g6 1–0

Botvinnik vs. the USSR vs. the World

Botvinnik had two final events in sight. The first was the extraordinary "Match of the Century," a ten-board, four-round match pitting the USSR against "the rest of the world," scheduled for March 29 to April 5, 1970. On paper, the Soviets seemed to be favored. But in the weeks before there was considerable apprehension in the chess and sports establishment. Sergei Pavlov, another former Komsomol chief, had become chairman of the Sports Committee in 1968. Just before the Belgrade match he held a tense meeting at his headquarters with several team members, including four world champions, and assorted apparatchiks. Pavlov wanted an answer to the key question: "What will be the result of the match?" There was silence until a familiar voice announced, "We will win." Everyone smiled at Botvinnik's guarantee and relaxed, Mikhail Beilin said.

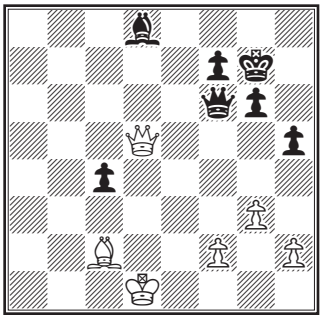
It was the kind of guarantee that Botvinnik had always refused to give. Ironically,

Botvinnik compared the selection of board order to his ousting from the 1952 Olympic team. "A number of grandmasters — those who were playing on the top boards — made sure that I was put on board eight," he wrote in *Achieving the Aim.* He saw it as an insult designed to get him to refuse to play. But board eight made sense. The www.chessmetrics.com Web site showed that there were seven Soviet players rated higher than Botvinnik at the time. Also, it was known that the "World" board eight would be Matulović, who had lost twice to Botvinnik in the previous three years.

Spassky, who, as world champion, had to be on the first board, suggested that the board order be determined by secret ballot. But the higher authorities "wouldn't hear of it," Alexander Nikitin, the team trainer, said. In the end, he said, "half the team wasn't talking to the other half."

Botvinnik wrote that if he had refused to go to Belgrade there was strong possibility the "World" would win. The only public hint of his fury came at a Moscow airport when team members gathered for the traditional "photo for history," Beilin said. "Mikhail Moiseyevich flatly refused to have his picture taken with the others. I tried to convince him but he answered me briefly and to the point, in the style of a champion, that he would not be photographed with 'them.'" He added that "the photos were assembled" to make it appear Botvinnik was with the team. And when *Shakhmaty v SSSR* reported the match in its June 1970 issue it ran a photograph captioned "Participants and Members of the Organizing Committee of the 'Match of the Century.'" Conspicuously missing were Botvinnik and Fischer.

In the end, Botvinnik fought hard with Matulović. He played out a very drawish queen ending so long in the second round that it was suspected that he deliberately allowed a stalemate on move 93 to get it over. He had the edge in three of the four games but only won one and drew the others as the Soviets narrowly won 20½–19½ *(diagram)*.



Milan Matulović–Botvinnik, USSR–Rest of the World, Belgrade 1970
After 35. ... Qf6

Botvinnik had been winning since the early middlegame but spoiled his chances by allowing a trade of the last pair of rooks. Here 36. f4! would have made winning very difficult.

36. Ke2? Bb6! 37. f4 Qc3! 38. Qe4 Bd4?

Black has two ideas, picking up all the kingside pawns or creating a mating net. Here 38. ... Bg1! would have won pawns. His inexact move allows White to defend them with 39. Kf1! Qa1+ 40. Kg2.

39. f5? g×f5 40. Q×f5 Qe3+

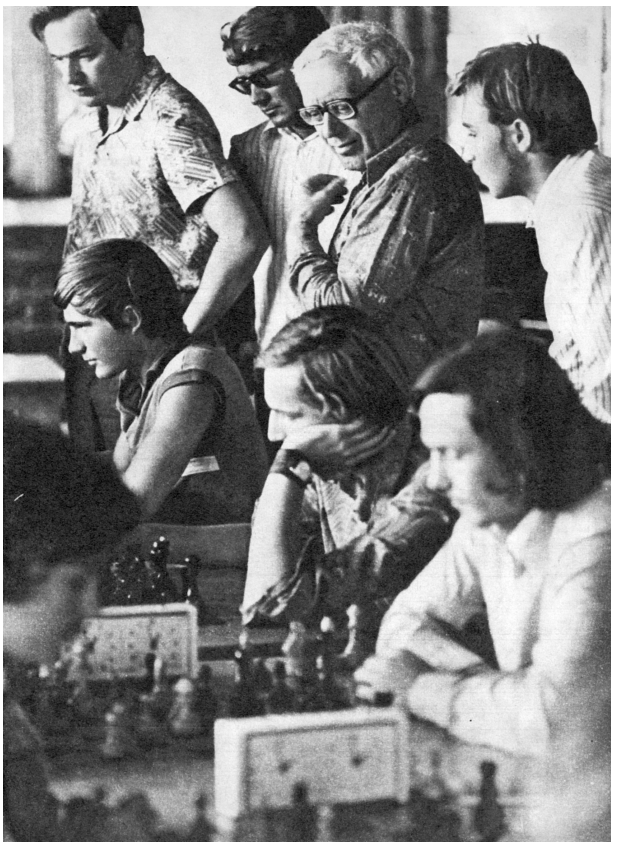
Now 41. Kd1 Bc3! would allow Black to mate as in his game with Medina at Palma de Mallorca 1967. "Grandmaster Matulović should have known my game with Medina, but did he know it?" he wrote.

41. Kf1 Qg1+ 42. Ke2 Q×h2+ 43. Kd1 Qg1+ 44. Ke2 Qe3+ 45. Kf1 Q×g3 46. Qh7+ Kf8 0–1

Botvinnik's final event was supposed to be a match with Fischer in the spring of 1970, to mark the 75th anniversary of the Chess Society of Leiden, the Netherlands. Botvinnik and Fischer negotiated indirectly, through the Dutch organizers. The Dutch were on a fool's errand. Botvinnik wanted a best-of-16-game match, an indication that he didn't have the stamina for the 24-game format that he had once considered sacred. But Fischer wanted no limit on games. The winner should be the first to score six victories, he said. (That was the format of the 1937 Botvinnik-vs.-Levenfish match. The FIDE temporarily adopted it for post–1972 world championship matches.)

Botvinnik thought he and Fischer had reached a compromise, through the Dutch, on a best-of-18-games format. He trained with Spassky for 20 days in September 1969 at the Black Sea resort town of Pitsunda. Botvinnik asked Viktor Baturinsky, a former KGB colonel who was about to become director of the Central Chess Club, to prepare a thick notebook with about 500 Fischer games. Botvinnik began each day at Pitsunda at 7 A.M., studying Fischer games and preparing openings. "He reminds me of the young Smyslov," Botvinnik told Spassky.

But Fischer insisted on the six-wins formula and the match collapsed because of what Botvinnik called the American's "maniacal" fear of returning to the board. The Dutch organizers replaced the match with a four-player tournament with rounds from April 18, 1970, to May 6. Botvinnik managed one good game, an endgame win from Bent Larsen and tied with the Dane for last place with



Botvinnik observes games played by some of his students at a summer session of his school for talented juniors, held at the Orlyonok camp on the Black Sea.

5½–6½. He was through with competition. "He couldn't create beautiful games any more," his daughter Olga said. She quoted him as saying he didn't want to just "slap pieces about the board."

Botvinnik the Author

While at Belgrade 1969, Botvinnik asked another entrant, Lev Polugayevsky, if he was writing a book. Polugayevsky had just turned 35 and replied that he had plenty of time in the future for books. "Why don't you admit it? You're a lazybones!" Botvinnik shot back. "You should be ashamed of yourself. It's the duty of every grandmaster to write books."

Botvinnik himself had written nothing significant in the early 1960s. "But after some hesitation" he agreed to collaborate on a massive collection of his games, according to Baturinsky, who served as editor. After five years' work, it appeared in three volumes, issued from 1965 to 1968, under the title *Shakhmatnoye Tvorchestvo Botvinnika* or "Chess Creativity of Botvinnik." Its press run of 30,000 copies quickly sold out.

Botvinnik's preoccupation with computers was evident in *Algoritm v Shakhmaty* or "Algorithm in Chess," which also appeared in 1968 and was followed by *O Kiberneticheskoi Tseli Igry*, "On the Cybernetic Goal of Play," in 1975. He also analyzed the candidates match games of his former student in *Tri Matchi Anatolya Karpova,* "Three Matches of Anatoly Karpov," in 1975. Minor books followed, such as a monograph on the Grünfeld Defense, written in 1979 with Yakov Estrin, with whom he had become close.

Strangely enough, it was the monograph that got Botvinnik into political trouble. He wanted to include a 1960 Polugayevsky–Korchnoi game. But Viktor Korchnoi had defected in 1976 and become a forbidden name. The authors were accused of planning to spread "propaganda for the 'villain' and 'renegade,'" according to Sergei Voronkov, who edited the book.

The matter reached the Central Committee. Botvinnik blamed one of his old enemies. "You know your colonel friend Vainshtein wrote a denunciation to the CC!" he told Viktor Malkin. "I tried to explain to him that Vainshtein was in retirement for a long, long time," Malkin said. Botvinnik objected: 'This plays no role. Vainshtein was a significant person, he preserved influential friends in the KGB, through them he acted."

But instead of an opening monograph that would soon be forgotten, Botvinnik's fans awaited his memoirs, which they expected after an excerpt appeared in the magazine *Yunost (Youth)*. During a lecture in Krasnogorsk, northwest of Moscow, on May 9, 1977, an audience member asked what happened to the book. "The publishing house sent the manuscript to the Sports Committee, which reacted negatively to it," Botvinnik replied. "They sent me the book with 22 comments and warned me that if I don't take them into account they wouldn't approve the book."

But a year later *Achieving the Aim* appeared in a huge press run of 75,000 copies. *Polveka v Shakhmatakh*, or "Half a Century of Chess," came out the same year in 100,000 copies. The former was an extraordinary work, the first true autobiography by a world

champion. It revealed the pythonic politics, petty feuds, arranged draws and apparent cheating which had only been hinted at before at the highest levels of chess. He settled old scores and made new accusations, such as charging Max Euwe with a breach of ethics at Nottingham more than forty years before.

Botvinnik must have envied Alexander Kotov, who never seemed to have difficulty getting his writing published. In 1980 Kotov's novel, based on the life of Alexander Alekhine, was even made into a movie, *White Snow of Russia*. Some of the people Botvinnik had known, including Nikolai Krylenko, Salo Flohr, Emanuel Lasker and Alekhine, were portrayed. Kotov, who also wrote the screenplay, was eager to get Botvinnik's reaction at the first screening, in a Mosfilm screening room, also attended by Gayane and Boris Podtserob. "I awaited it with concern, even fear," Kotov said. "Interesting film, not like any other, deeply patriotic," was Botvinnik's terse review.

Less than a year later Kotov was gone. Botvinnik's rivals were dying off: Keres in 1975 (at 59), Isaak Boleslavsky in 1977 (at 57), Ilya Kan in 1978, Igor Bondarevsky in 1979, Flohr in 1983. Earlier it was Grigory Levenfish in 1961, Vyacheslav Ragozin in 1962, Pyotr Romanovsky in 1964 and Vitaly Chekhover in 1965.

Boris Turov, an editor who worked with Botvinnik in the mid–1960s, was apprehensive when Botvinnik approached him in the early 1980s about working on his most ambitious work. This was the four-volume *Analytical.* Turov said he agreed "without special enthusiasm" because he knew of Botvinnik's "complex character" and because of the commitment he was making. "Five years of collaborative work! Almost three thousand pages of manuscript. Tens of meetings, the majority of which took place in Botvinnik's home. Hundreds of phone calls. I still have his voice in my ear, pronouncing the phrase 'Ba-a-ahris Isa-a-akovich, it is Botvinnik!'"

Their relationship was rocky. "Once we didn't speak for more than a month" and only the intervention of Lev Abramov ended the conflict. But the result, published over 1984–1987, was another triumph. Botvinnik analyzed, with somewhat different notes, 380 of his most interesting games plus 28 training games.

Pioneer

At the Alekhine Memorial tournament in 1971, an elite grandmaster event, Miguel Najdorf saw David Bronstein and asked "Where's Michael?" "I didn't understand immediately," Bronstein recalled, until Najdorf added, "Where is Botvinnik?" "He generally doesn't come to tournaments," Bronstein replied. "He didn't visit a single world championship match in which he wasn't playing." Instead, Bronstein said, "He sat at home and gave evaluations by phone. And in the press room all the time they were saying 'Botvinnik recommends this, Botvinnik criticizes that.'"

But if Botvinnik was going to leave a more lasting legacy than his games, it wouldn't be students, books or comments to the press room. It would be a chessplaying computer. He had been thinking about it since 1958. During the USSR–World match, the Yugoslav newspaper *Politika* ran a short article in which Botvinnik disputed "the current opinion"

that he had turned to computers "to get revenge against the grandmasters" after his results declined. He said he had begun work on a chess program in 1960 and noted that when mathematicians tackled the topic ten years before that, no one questioned their motives.

But others questioned his motives. Karpov recalled how Botvinnik told students at his school that within several years no human could beat his program. "We understood one thing: The champion had left the arena, but in his place he was preparing an avenger, a soulless chess murderer to defeat everyone in the name of its creator," Karpov said. Smyslov, who had become Botvinnik's close friend, asked him what the future role of human chessplayers would be. "Chessplayers aren't needed," he answered. "There will be programmers and that's enough."

Botvinnik exchanged ideas with some foreign experts in artificial intelligence, even playing chess with Claude Shannon, the "father" of chess programming in May 1965 at a Moscow conference. But he grossly underestimated the task. Bent Larsen said Botvinnik was "very naive" when they talked at length about chess programs in early 1965. "At that time he was very optimistic and said it would happen very soon that a computer would be the best player in the world," Larsen added. Botvinnik initially claimed his was "almost ready." But "then he started discussing the possibilities for a computer playing king and pawn endings." In fact, he considered it a triumph when his program solved the famous but simple K+P–vs.–K+P study by Richard Réti.

Despite Botvinnik's considerable scientific background, he tried and failed to learn to write a program. Instead, he worked with four software developers, on his project, dubbed Pioneer in December 1976. The first one, Boris Stilman, was a senior in the Math Department of Moscow State University. He met Botvinnik in 1971 when he was 21 and eventually worked on Pioneer from 1972 to 1988. "Our relationship the first ten years was very close," Stilman said. Botvinnik invited Stilman to work with him literally everywhere, in his office, his apartment, over daily hours-long phone conversations, even at Nikolina Gora almost every week, he said. Botvinnik was constantly coming up with new ideas for Pioneer. "Someone was needed to give him feedback on all the ideas he was generating," Stilman said. "He probably found in me the right person."

But Pioneer faced huge obstacles. Soviet computer technology took a step backward, compared with the West, in the 1970s and Botvinnik could not obtain state funds to buy enough computer time. In the 1970s and 1980s Botvinnik's team used Western-made computers that were available in Moscow, according to Stilman. These were a British ICL 4–70, at the Computing Center of the State Planning Committee, and later an American IBM 370/148, at the "Healthcare" Computing Center. However, the computing time was always very limited and, sometimes, not available at all. "So he was looking around in the West," Stilman said. In 1977 the Control Data Corporation, based in Minneapolis, made an official invitation to Botvinnik to bring his team to America and use a CDC computer to complete Pioneer. The CDC's Cyber 176 was considered the fastest computer commercially available. Botvinnik believed it would take about half a year to finish Pioneer in the West. He needed approval.

"He wrote to Brezhnev. He wrote to Kosygin," Stilman said, referring to General

Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and Council of Ministers Chairman Alexey Kosygin, the leaders of the Party and state. But all he got were meetings with officials and "very polite refusals," said Stilman. "Because of his persistence" the Central Committee arranged for a review of his invitation, conducted by Soviet scientists on February 9, 1979. The answer was still no: "They claimed it might be dangerous to take the program out of the country because it may have defense value," Stilman said. "Imagine how mad he was about that."

There are two ironies here. One is that in August 1981 Botvinnik was awarded the Order of the October Revolution, a medal usually given for military services (but also granted for advancing the cause of Communism or the nation). Secondly, Botvinnik got the Soviet chess federation to invite the Bell Labs–developed program "Belle," winner of the 1980 World Computer Chess Championship, to Moscow in 1982. But it was confiscated at Kennedy Airport by U.S. officials who said it was of military value and could not be allowed abroad. "It was the first time in the history of chess that a world champion was arrested," Botvinnik said.

Computerized Socialism

He continued to misjudge how much quick progress Pioneer could make and what other programs could achieve. Belle relied more on calculating ability, and Pioneer relied more on algorithm. Botvinnik considered the "brute force" approach flawed. "With the greater depth of variations, the number of calculated positions grows catastrophically," he wrote. "If Belle tries to play a line of a variation of 15 half-moves (which for a chess master is a normal case) then the search would demand about 300 days of uninterrupted work." A year later during a lecture in Riga he was asked when Pioneer would be ready to take on Belle. He evaded the question by replying, "We hope that Pioneer will play strongly and compete with the strongest foreign programs."

In 1983 Botvinnik made his only visit to the United States, to attend the World Computer Chess Championship, which was organized by Monty Newborn, a computer chess authority who was his host. While attending the New York tournament, Botvinnik was reunited with Reuben Fine and Samuel Reshevsky for one final photograph that appeared in *Chess Life.* The American rivals were willing to appear with Botvinnik — but needed convincing to meet one another.

Also, while in New York Botvinnik ran afoul of Soviet authorities. According to a KGB denunciation found in Central Committee archives by historian/journalist Viktor Snitkovsky, Botvinnik engaged in "cynical anti–Soviet conduct." The document, marked "completely secret" and dated May 17, 1984, said Botvinnik spoke with a correspondent for the New York–based newspaper *Novoye Russkoye Slovo* for an article that appeared November 2, 1983. Botvinnik was summoned before Sports Committee to answer this and other denunciations alleging improper contact with foreigners. He defended himself by saying that some of his thoughts had previously been reported in the Soviet press and anything new in his comments had been distorted by the New York reporter. That appeared to be the end of it. But Botvinnik rarely traveled abroad after this. Korchnoi

claimed Botvinnik was banned from foreign travel for a period after 1983 because he criticized Karpov by saying he was "about as fertile as a woman who has been sterilized."

Pioneer did make progress in the 1980s, Stilman said. And Botvinnik saw a new use for his work. "After several years of work on the chess program he added to it an economic program based on those principles of solving chess problems — universal, suitable for socialism and for capitalism," his daughter Olga said. "The possibilities of man are limited," she quoted him as saying. "He needs the help of a computer." Botvinnik was able to finish the economic program first because, he said, "The task of managing the economy is simpler than chess."

His nephew Igor said he offered his economic program to Soviet authorities in September 1984 in a lengthy letter but was turned down. That didn't diminish his optimism about Pioneer. "Without false modesty, he used to say 'If I finish the work, the discovery is on the level of the discovery of Einstein's theory of relativity,'" Igor Botvinnik said.

Stilman and one of the other four software engineers left the team in 1988 and the two others left on bad terms after that. Botvinnik continued to work on Pioneer, with a regular turnover in personnel. His confidence remained high. Stilman later converted principles of Pioneer to a new type of game theory, Linguistic Geometry. But, he said, Pioneer never reached the point where it could play an entire chess game. It could find the best move in some — but not all — middlegame positions but took two hours to do it.

Last Moves

Botvinnik, who believed so much in order, was convinced that world champions would die in the sequence in which they had won the title. This had been the case since William Steinitz. But the death of Tigran Petrosian in 1984, four days before Botvinnik's 73rd birthday, upset him. He later told journalist Evgeny Gik that he regretted "not succeeding in making peace" with the man who had taken the title from him. When Yakov Estrin and he had a falling out, they didn't speak for some time but Botvinnik made up with him before his former collaborator died in 1987.

Botvinnik didn't trust the political changes sweeping the Soviet Union in the 1980s. "I didn't leave the Party," he said. "The Party left me!" He was in Brussels in August 1991, as an honored guest during the FIDE candidate matches, when he received a congratulatory message and a bottle of champagne from Mikhail Gorbachev in observance of the Patriarch's 80th birthday. He agreed to an interview with a Dutch journalist and railed against political changes under Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. (This happened two days before the beginning of the failed coup that led to the breakup of the Soviet Union.)

"The Soviet Union is now approaching some kind of South American or African banana republic," he said. "Complete chaos, no kind of order!" He also took part in an interview with Gennady Sosonko in which he sharply criticized the way chess was changing. He was "ashamed of the quality of play in the world championship" and the way big prize money and faster time controls had corrupted the game. "I stand for chess remaining

chess and not turning into tennis," he said. His daughter said he often said of speed chess, "It's the death of chess as an art." When a Botvinnik memorial tournament was played at fast time limits, Yuri Averbakh said, "If Botvinnik knew that blitz games would be played in his honor he, excuse me, would turn over in his grave."

His views put him at odds with Kasparov, who had become world champion. Not long before Botvinnik's death, "I made an attempt to bring peace between Botvinnik and Kasparov," Averbakh said. They agreed to meet at the Club. "The conversation of the champions continued for an hour and a half but it was a talk between two deaf people," he said. "Each heard only himself."

Botvinnik shared the fate of two of his championship rivals: failing eyesight. Bronstein gave up tournament play in 1997 when his vision declined, according to Tatiana Boleslavskaya. Smyslov stopped playing in 2002 because he said he "significantly lost vision." Botvinnik, who "had poor vision since childhood, began to go blind," his daughter said. "In the final years he couldn't see anything with one eye, and only a bit with the other." He relied on his memory of his apartment and *dacha.*

After the death of his beloved Gayane on December 4, 1987, he often spent five days alone at the *dacha* and was visited by relatives on weekends. But he managed on his own and even swept snow from his driveway as late as February 1995. His insomnia returned. If he couldn't sleep he would get dressed, open a window of the *dacha,* sit in a chair and study opening positions, such as 1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Ne7 and 3. Nd2 Ne7, according to Igor Botvinnik. "The strongest self-discipline helped him to live and work," his daughter said. He continued to visit the Club regularly to work on Pioneer. But on March 8, 1995, he was hospitalized for what turned out to be pancreatic cancer. It was the same disease that had killed Petrosian and Estrin. After two weeks in the hospital he had had enough. "I will die at home," he said.

"I need two to three good months to finish the scientific work," he told one of his doctors, according to Igor Botvinnik. He had only three days. He spent them dictating ideas about Pioneer, his daughter said. "Is today May 6?" he asked at the very end. "No, Mikhail Moisyevich," he was told, "Today is May 5." Botvinnik was well aware he had played his final tournament game 25 years before on May 6, 1970. He died on the 5th.

He didn't want any VIPs at his funeral. "No chessplayers," he ordered. "I want to leave quietly!" He was cremated and buried next to his mother and wife at Novodevichy Cemetery, a short distance from the graves of Anton Chekhov and Mikhail Bulgakov. Among the enduring tributes: The Club was renamed. Today it is the "Central House of Chessplayers in the name of Botvinnik."

Appendix A. Chronology

August 17, 1911—Mikhail Moiseyevich Botvinnik is born in Kuokkola, Grand Duchy of Finland, the second son of Moisei and Serafina Botvinnik.

November 7–8, 1917—Bolshevik-led seizure of power in St. Petersburg begins Russian Civil War.

September 1918—Botvinnik begins classes at the 157th United Labor School in Petrograd (the city to be renamed Leningrad in 1924).

1920—His father leaves the family and his mother falls ill.

September 1923—His brother's friend Lenya Baskin teaches him how to play chess.

February 1924—He follows Emanuel Lasker's simultaneous exhibitions in Leningrad.

June 1, 1924—He joins the Petrograd Chess Assembly.

1924–1925—He competes in school tournaments, matches and team events and attains second-category, then first-category status.

November 20, 1925—He defeats José Capablanca in a 30-board simultaneous exhibition.

July 7, 1926—He finishes second in the Leningrad Championship.

November 6–7, 1926—He scores a draw and a win against Gösta Stoltz in a Leningrad–Stockholm team match.

December 1, 1926—His win over Capablanca appears in *Izvestia*.

December 1926—After trying "for a long time" he is accepted as a candidate member of the Komsomol, the Young Communist League or junior division of the Soviet Communist Party.

September 26–November 25, 1927—He competes in his first Soviet Championship and finishes tied for 5th, earning the master title.

August 1928—He passes exams for Leningrad Polytechnical Institute.

February 1929—He begins classes at the Polytechnic.

March 23, 1931—He wins the Leningrad Championship with a 14–3 score.

Summer 1931—He performs student service at Dneprostroi Dam and Hydroelectric complex.

October 1–November 11, 1931—He wins the 7th Soviet Championship.

December 1932—He becomes a postgraduate student.

November 28–December 19, 1933—He draws a 12-game match with Salo Flohr.

February 1934—His book on the Flohr match is published.

May 1, 1934—He meets Gayane Davidovna Ananova.

August 17–September 1, 1934—He wins the "Tournament with the Participation of Euwe and Kmoch."

December 27, 1934–January 5, 1935—In his first foreign tournament, at Hastings, he scores a disappointing 5–4.

February 15–March 15, 1935—He shares first prize in second Moscow international tournament.

April 28, 1935—He and Gayane are married in Leningrad.

May 14–June 8, 1936—He finishes second, behind Capablanca, in third Moscow international.

August 10–28, 1936—He ties for first with Capablanca at Nottingham.

Fall 1936—He begins work on his dissertation.

June 28, 1937—He defends his dissertation at the Leningrad Polytechnic.

October 5–November 10, 1937—He draws a match, five wins to five wins, for the Soviet Championship title with Grigory Levenfish.

July 29, 1938—Nikolai Krylenko, a powerful state prosecutor and Botvinnik benefactor, is executed during Terror purge. Botvinnik briefly succeeds him as head of Soviet chess.

November 2–27, 1938—He finishes third, behind Paul Keres and Reuben Fine at the AVRO tournament in the Netherlands. Before leaving Amsterdam he and Alexander Alekhine reach a tentative agreement to play a world championship match at a date to be determined.

1938—His first *Izbranniye Partii*, a collection of 60 games played through 1936, is published.

January 1939—"The Soviet government authorized the organization and financing" of the Alekhine match.

April 15–May 16, 1939—He wins the 11th Soviet Championship in Leningrad.

September 1, 1939—World War II begins, putting an Alekhine match on hold.

1939—His article about how he prepares for tournaments is published in his tournament book about the 11th Soviet Championship.

May 2–29, 1940—He wins a training match with Ragozin by 7½–2½.

September 5–October 3, 1940—He finishes in a disappointing tie for 5th place in the 12th Soviet Championship.

December 1940—He writes chess section head Vladimir Snegiriev to propose an "Absolute Championship" tournament to replace the planned Bondarevsky-Lilienthal 12th Championship playoff match.

1940—He begins giving weekly classes at Leningrad Pioneer Palace. Among his students is Mark Taimanov.

1940—He becomes a member of Communist Party.

March 23–April 19, 1941—He wins the Absolute Championship.

June 22, 1941—Nazi invasion of the USSR.

August 19, 1941—He and his family evacuate to Perm (renamed Molotov) in Urals.

September 17, 1941—His brother Isya, who had been drafted into the Red Army on August 1, is killed by a bomb near Leningrad.

April 26, 1942—Daughter Olga is born in Perm.

January 1943—He writes to Vyacheslav Molotov and is granted free time for chess.

April 20–May 16, 1943—He wins a master tournament in Sverdlovsk.

December 5, 1943–January 11, 1944—He wins the Moscow Championship with a 12½–2½ score. He moves to Moscow this winter.

May 21–June 14, 1944—He wins the 13th Soviet Championship in Moscow.

May 9, 1945—War ends for the USSR.

June 1–July 3, 1945—He wins the 14th Soviet Championship.

July 1945—Showdown with Boris Vainshtein over the Botvinnik–Alekhine match, which is ultimately decided in his favor.

September 1–4, 1945—U.S.–USSR radio match. Botvinnik beats Arnold Denker 2–0.

February 4, 1946—He officially challenges Alekhine to a match.

March 24, 1946—Alekhine dies suddenly in Estoril, Portugal.

August 12–September 7, 1946—First great postwar tournament is won by Botvinnik at Groningen, the Netherlands.

September 12–16, 1946—U.S.–USSR match in Moscow. Botvinnik beats Samuel Reshevsky 1½–½. Soviets win 12½–7½.

September 17, 1946—Botvinnik, Reshevsky, Max Euwe, Paul Keres, and Vasily Smyslov reach a gentleman's agreement to hold a world championship match-tournament in The Hague and Moscow.

December 1946—Sports Committee head Nikolai Romanov tells Botvinnik the government has to repudiate the September agreement. Botvinnik says he decided to give up chess.

November 25–December 23, 1947—He wins Chigorin Memorial tournament in Moscow.

March 2–May 18, 1948—He wins match-tournament in The Hague/Moscow and becomes the sixth officially recognized world champion.

1949—His expanded *Izbranniye Partii (Selected Games)* with 100 games is published.

January–June 1950—He designs and builds his *dacha*, or summer home, at Nikolina Gora near Moscow.

March 15–May 11, 1951—He draws a 24-game match with David Bronstein and retains his world championship title.

June 28, 1951—He defends his doctoral dissertation, which is eventually approved.

November 11–December 14, 1951—Botvinnik slumps in the second half of the 19th Soviet Championship and finishes fifth.

March 3–April 4, 1952—He finishes in a tie for 3rd at a Maróczy Memorial in Budapest, behind Keres and Yefim Geller.

June 14, 1952—His mother dies.

July 15, 1952—At Voronovo rest home, Soviet chess officials and Botvinnik rivals discuss denying him a place on the nation's first Olympiad team. Botvinnik refuses to defend himself.

November 29–December 29, 1952—He ties for first with Taimanov in 20th Soviet Championship.

January 25–February 4, 1953—He wins the 20th Championship playoff match.

March 16–May 12, 1954—World Championship match with Smyslov ends in 12–12 tie. He retains his world championship title.

May 29, 1954—He writes letter titled "Can there be a World Socialist Revolution without World War III?" to Communist Party ideologist P.N. Pospelov.

September 4–25, 1954—As first board, he scores six wins and five draws to lead the USSR team to gold medals at the Amsterdam Olympiad.

February 11–March 15, 1955—He ties for third place in the 22nd Soviet Championship.

June 29–July 6, 1955—He loses one and draws three games with Reshevsky in a U.S.–USSR match in Moscow.

August 31–September 24, 1956—He scores six wins and seven draws on the gold-medal-winning Soviet team in the Moscow Olympiad.

1956—He begins to lobby FIDE to grant a defeated world champion the right to a rematch.

October 8–November 2, 1956—He ties with Smyslov for first place in the Alekhine Memorial in Moscow.

March 5–April 27, 1957—He loses his title to Smyslov in 9½–12½ match defeat.

1957—He is awarded the Order of Lenin.

March 4–May 8, 1958—He regains the championship title 12½–10½ from Smyslov in a Moscow rematch.

October 1–23, 1958—He loses his first Olympiad game but scores 9–3 on first board of the gold-medal-winning Soviet team at the Munich Olympiad.

October 28–November 3, 1958—He wins a small international at Wageningen, the Netherlands.

1959—FIDE eliminates a losing champion's right to a rematch as of 1963.

March 15–May 7, 1960—He loses the world championship title again, to Mikhail Tal, by an 8½–12½ score.

October 17–November 8, 1960—He scores eight wins, five draws on the gold-medal-winning Soviet team at Olympiad in Leipzig.

March 15–May 12, 1961—He regains the world championship title from Tal by a 13–8 score.

1961—He is awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor medal.

December 27, 1961–January 23, 1962—He returns to Hastings after 27 years and redeems himself with a first-place finish, then wins another international in Stockholm.

September 16–October 9, 1962—He plays first board for the last time on the national team, scoring five wins, six draws and one loss at the Varna Olympiad. He draws a closely watched game with Bobby Fischer.

March 23–May 20, 1963—He loses the world championship title for the last time, to Tigran Petrosian, 9½–12½.

1963—He begins his chess school for talented juniors.

November 2–25, 1964—He scores 10–2 on second board for the first-place Soviet team at an Olympiad in Tel Aviv.

1964–1969—He takes part in 16 Soviet team events, scoring 51½–20½.

1965–1968—His four-volume game collection, *Shakhmatnoye Tvorchestvo Botvinnika (Chess Creativity of Botvinnik)* is published.

February 21–28, 1965—He wins a small international at Nordwijk aan Zee, the Netherlands.

July 5–15, 1966—He wins an IBM-sponsored Amsterdam international by two points.

December 28, 1966–January 6, 1967—He wins a Hastings international.

November 25–December 17, 1967—He wins a Palma de Mallorca international ahead of Smyslov, Lajos Portisch and Svetozar Gligorić.

April 3–17, 1968—He finishes second, a half point behind Bent Larsen, at a Monte Carlo international.

January 1969—He ties for first with Geller at a Wijk aan Zee international.

Fall 1969—He negotiates details of a match with Fischer and later prepares for it with Boris Spassky.

November 21–December 14, 1969—He finishes seventh, his lowest international showing ever, at a Belgrade international.

March 29–April 5, 1970—Despite his resentment over being chosen to play board eight, he scores one win and three draws on a winning Soviet team in a USSR–Rest of the World match in Belgrade.

April 18–May 8, 1970—After a Fischer match is canceled, a four-player tournament is organized in Leiden, the Netherlands. Botvinnik scores 5½–6½ in his last competition.

1975—*O Kiberneticheskoi Tseli Igry (On the Cybernetic Goal of Chess)* is published.

December 1976—He names his computer program "Pioneer."

August 7–9, 1977—He visits North America for first time to attend the 2nd World Computer Chess Championship in Toronto.

1978—*Polveka v Shakhmatax (Half a Century of Chess)* and *K Dostizheniyu Tseli (Achieving the Aim)* are published.

December 12, 1978—He writes to the Central Committee asking permission to work on Pioneer in the U.S. or West Germany.

February 9, 1979—A committee of scientists empaneled by the Central Committee meets and rejects his request to work on Pioneer abroad.

1979—*Ot Shakmatista k Mashinye (From Chessplayer to Machine)* and *Zashchita Gruenfelda (Grünfeld Defense)* are published.

August 14, 1981—Botvinnik is awarded an Order of the October Revolution by the Supreme Soviet, in a Kremlin declaration signed by Leonid Brezhnev.

October 22–25, 1983—He attends the 4th World Computer Chess Championship in New York.

1984–1987—*Analiticheskiye i Kriticheskiye Raboty (Analytical and Critical Works)* is published in four volumes.

December 4, 1987—Gayane Davidovna dies.

May 5, 1995—Mikhail Moiseyevich Botvinnik dies.

Appendix B. Career Record Against Opponents

Training and exhibition games not counted. Wins–Losses–Draws

Vladimir Alatortsev 8–0–3
Alexander Alekhine 1–0–2
Yuri Averbakh 3–0–5
Fyodor Bohatyrchuk 0–3–1
Isaak Boleslavsky 7–0–6
Igor Bondarevsky 3–2–5
David Bronstein 7–6–18
José Capablanca 1–1–5
Vitaly Chekhover 6–0–3
Jan Hein Donner 4–0–8
Maxe Euwe 2–2–8
Salo Flohr 5–2–23
Semyon Furman 4–0–1
Yefim Geller 1–4–3
Svetozar Gligorić 2–2–6
Ilya Kan 18–4–5
Paul Keres 8–3–9
Viktor Korchnoi 2–1–1
Alexander Kotov 4–1–4
Bent Larsen 3–2–3
Grigory Levenfish 7–5–7
Andre Lilienthal 5–2–4
Miguel Najdorf 2–1–1
Tigran Petrosian 7–6–18
Lev Polugayevsky 1–0–1
Lajos Portisch 1–0–3
Vyacheslav Ragozin 12–0–12
Samuel Reshevsky 5–2–7
Nikolai Riumin 4–1–3
Vasily Smyslov 26–20–51
Boris Spassky 1–0–6
László Szabó 4–1–6
Mark Taimanov 4–2–6
Mikhail Tal 12–12–20

Notes on Sources

See the Bibliography. All translations from the Russian are by the author.

Introduction

The Voronovo minutes appeared in *64*, No. 1, 2003. For chess being under authority of Department of Propaganda and Agitation, see Averbakh, *Centre-Stage and Behind the Scenes*. The Soviets won four of the six board prizes at three Olympiads, according to www.olimpbase.org, but never more than that. Lilienthal on Botvinnik, quoted in Vasiliev, *Aktyori Shakhmatnoi Stseny*. Averbakh comments about Botvinnik are in *64*, No. 2, 2002, and *Sport Express*, August 17, 2011. Ivkov on Botvinnik, in *64*, No. 10, 2007. Bent Larsen, asked whether Botvinnik was a "pleasant person," told *Chess Horizons*, Jan.-Feb. 1990, "The man who was number one in Soviet chess during the Stalin years — well, you don't expect him to be kind, to cuddle kittens and to pat little children on the head." Botvinnik said he was "a very solitary person" in a 1961 interview reprinted in *Chess Life*, June 1962. Malkin on Botvinnik and his wife, in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, No. 3, 1995. Botvinnik's attitude to food, in *64*, No. 3, 2005.

In *64*, No. 17–18, 1994, he wrote about Geller and the world championship: "Alas, Geller could not fight because of his tendency to epicureanism. Apparently to become world champion it's useful to be something of a puritan." Botvinnik's comments on laziness include "Well, why beat about the bush, [Ragozin] was a little lazy," from Botvinnik, *Half a Century of Chess*. For Botvinnik's passion for soccer and ballet, see article by Lev Abramov, *64*, No. 14, 1981. Botvinnik and Aeroflot, *64*, No. 8, 1991. Botvinnik on Stalin, *64*, No. 5, 1995.

Kramnik on Botvinnik is from an article *From Steinitz to Kasparov* on the site www.e3e5.com. In *64*, No. 8, 2001, Kramnik said, "He was an ardent adherent of communism but completely sincere and not out for mercenary motives. In that he was strikingly different from those who then led our nation." For Gulko on Botvinnik see 2008 interview on sportsdaily.ru. Gulko says in *The KGB Plays Chess* that Botvinnik was an "ideological" and "idiosyncratic" Communist. Spassky spoke of Botvinnik in *Faktov*, July 19, 2007. Beilin on Botvinnik, in *64*, No. 24, 1987.

Chapter 1

Inaccurate information about Botvinnik's birth includes *Shakmatny Slovar*'s saying he was born in "a suburb of Petersburg." "Botvinnik was born not far from St. Petersburg," Kasparov wrote in *My Great Predecessors, Part II*. Botvinnik's account of his youth comes from his *Achieving the Aim*, *Analytical* and a *New in Chess*, No. 5, 1995, interview with Sosonko. Other details about Botvinnik's family appear in the Kentler article "Poklon Botvinniku" on www.e3e5. com. "In 1918 and 1919 we lived very modestly," comes from Hurst, *Curse of Kirsan*. Botvinnik's attraction to chess, in *Match Veka* (Yudovich). Vladimir Zak said in *64*, No. 6, 1988, that 7 or 8 is the best age for a child to learn chess. Told that Botvinnik said the right age was 11 or 12, he replied, "You know Botvinnik drew his conclusion based on one, two, even 10 examples. But I work with children nearly half a century."

Botvinnik's daughter Olga Fioshkina wrote about her father in the articles "Botvinnik, Kak

On Buil" on www.russiachess.org, September 19, 2012, and "Moi Otets Botvinnik" in *64*, No. 5, 1998. Botvinnik wrote about his brother in *Achieving the Aim* and in *64*, No. 5, 2000. Botvinnik and Kaminer in Kofman, *Izbranniye Etyudi S. Kaminer i M. Liburkin*. Taimanov on familia, interview with *Sports Express*, August 2009. Karpov and Gik also discussed it in their *Vsyo o Shakhmatakh*. The Botvinnik-Kaminer composition is from Archakov, *Grossmeisterskiye Kompozitsii*.

Botvinnik spoke of composing in *Half a Century of Chess*. Averbakh on Yakov Rokhlin and Capablanca is in *64*, No. 1, 2003. For Rokhlin on the 1925 simultaneous, see *64*, No. 48, 1973, *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, No. 7, 1977, and Rokhlin, *Kniga o Shakhmatakh*. Gulko comments from his *The KGB Plays Chess*. Botvinnik cited the Shebarshin game in *Match Veka* and annotated it in his game collections. The description of Technocratic, Romantic and Radical Communism is from *The Red Flag*. Nikitin wrote about his studies in *64*, No. 9, 2003, and No. 1, 2007.

Chapter 2

The Rokhlin game is from Botvinnik, *15 Games and Their Stories* and *Shakhmaty*, No. 9, 1980. In *Half a Century of Chess* Botvinnik said he spent part of summer 1926 at Sestoretsk and visited Ilya Rabinovich in nearby Razliv, where he helped correct Rabinovich's manuscript on a soon-to-be-published endgame book. It's not clear if he mis-remembered or visited Sestoretsk in both 1926 and 1927. The description of Krylenko is from Baturinsky, *Stranitsy Shakhmatnoi Zhisny*. Sergei Voronkov's article on the 5th Soviet Championship, "Ptentsy Krylenko Stanovyatsya na Krylo," at www.e3e5.com, was invaluable.

The ruble values come from Vadim Faibisovic's article "V Kopliku Botvinnikovedeniya" on www.e3e5.com. Botvinnik's 1977 lecture comment about a late arriving opponent was quoted in *64*, No. 8, 2001. The letter to the Polytechnic dean was cited by Kentler on www.e3e5.com. Linder, *Koroli Shakhmatnovo Mira* said 95 percent of the places in the Polytechnic were set aside for children of "workers" and the other 5 percent were awarded on the basis of testing. For Vainshtein on Botvinnik, see *Shakhmatny Vestnik*, No. 8-9, 1993. Botvinnik on the Liverpool Hotel analysis, in *64*, No. 13-14, 1994. Baturinsky on Botvinnik in *Stranitsy Shakhmatnoi Zhisny*.

Vasiliev on the 6th Championship is from Vasiliev, *Aktyori Skahkmatnoi Stseny*. Vasiliev said he had never seen a person "with such a feeling of independence, self respect" as Botvinnik. Voronkov wrote about the 6th Soviet Championship in "Odesskaya Ruletka" on www.chesspro.ru. Botvinnik on "breaking the rules" is from a lecture on May 9, 1977, that was reported in *64*, No. 19, 1977. Kan's comments in his *Shakhmatniye Vstrechi*. The "Iks" affair is described in *64*, No. 45, 1978, and in Dlugolensky, *Lyudi i Shakhmaty*. "Krylenko laughed heartily when he heard" about "Iks," Botvinnik wrote in *Achieving the Aim*.

Chapter 3

The Znosko-Borovsky interview appeared August 18, 1931. Yudovich on Krylenko is from *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, No. 7, 1985. For Botvinnik on older Leningrad players see Averbakh interview in www.sport-express.ru, August 2011 and Averbakh, *Centre-stage and Behind the Scenes*. Smotky's analysis appeared in an article, Paradoks Patriarka, on www.chesspro.ru. Botvinnik on Stalin, *64*, No. 5, 1995. Other 7th Championship details come from Voronkov's article, "Blesk i Nishcheta Mossovki," on www.chesspro.ru. Botvinnik on his writing style, *New in Chess*, No. 4, 1991. Botvinnik's notes to the Goglidze game appeared in *64*, No. 8, 1991.

Riumin on the eve of the 7th Championship game was described by Yudovich in *64*, No. 9, 1987. Botvinnik on vodka and collectivization, quoted in Hurst, *Curse of Kirsan*. Botvinnik on playing too much, *New in Chess*, No. 5, 1995. Ståhlberg wrote about Botvinnik in *Chess and Chessmasters*. Botvinnik on 8th Championship in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, No. 11, 1933. Voronkov's www.chesspro.ru article, "Zerkalo dlya Narkoma," was also useful. Flohr on Rauzer–Botvinnik in Linder, *Estetika Shakhmat*. Botvinnik on tiredness in *64*, No. 7, 1987.

Chapter 4

Flohr wrote about the 1933 match in Baturinsky, *Grossmeister Flohr*. "All masters" opposed the match is from an August 1991 Botvinnik interview in Ten Geuzendam, *Finding Bobby Fischer*. "How I Prepared" was reprinted in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, No. 8, 1981. Botvinnik's advice to Kasparov is from an Asrian article on www.chesspro.ru, January 2011. Botvinnik quoting Capa-

blanca to his students is from an article by Yuri Razuvaev in *64*, No. 12, 2007. Flohr's article on match in *Narodni Listy* appeared January 17, 1934, and was quoted in Baturinsky, *Grossmeister Flohr*. Botvinnik in *Achieving the Aim* said the score of the Bogolyubov–Romanovsky match was 6½–2½ but Cafferty, *The Soviet Championships* said it was 8–4.

Botvinnik on his wife, *New in Chess*, No. 5, 1995, and in an article, "Zhena," in *64*, No. 16, 1991. Accounts differ on whether they met on May 1 or May 2. Olga Fioshkina on her parents in Botvinnik, in the article "Kak On Buil" on www.russiachess.org, September 19, 2012. Pavel Kalantarov competed in the first Leningrad Championship, according to Dlugolensky, *Lyudi i Shakhmaty*. Botvinnik said he was a second-category player and the deputy of a senior Polytechnic official. Botvinnik wrote of Hastings in *Achieving the Aim*. Samuil Vainshtein on Hastings was quoted in Linder, *Koroli Shakhmatnovo Mira*. Lilienthal on Hastings, *64*, No. 6, 1995.

Chapter 5

Vainshtein described the Spielmann game in *Lovushki Fierzberi*. Lilienthal on Moscow 1935, in *64*, No. 5, 2006. Botvinnik asking Lasker where he missed win and other details about Moscow 1935 are in *Achieving the Aim*. In *64*, No. 26, 1969, Botvinnik said Lasker's comment was, "And why do you necessarily want to win every game?" Gligorić on Botvinnik's secrecy in his *The World Chess Championship*. Before World War II, the only player receiving a government stipend was Botvinnik "and only as an addition to his base salary as an engineer," wrote Alexey Suetin in *64*, No. 9-10, 1993. Tartakower wrote about Botvinnik in his *Neue Schachsterne*. For Karastelin on Krylenko, see *64*, No. 8, 2007.

On the bad blood between Botvinnik and Bohatyrchuk: Botvinnik told his nephew Igor that he hated Bohatyrchuk "because he collaborated with the Germans and left Kiev in 1943" and because of an incident in the civil war. See *Shakhmaty v Rossii*, No. 1-2, 1998. The modern view of Botvinnik–Capablanca comes from Beliavsky, *Secrets of Chess Intuition*. Malkin on Moscow 1936, in *64*, No. 5, 1998. On Levenfish allegedly being asked to throw a game, see Kasparov, *My Great Predecessors, Part II*. For Officer Tregyonkov see *Shakhmaty v Rossii*, No. 7, 1997. Korchnoi comment comes from *New in Chess*, No. 5, 1995. Igor Botvinnik's reply appeared in No. 6.

Chapter 6

Botvinnik spoke of the Terror in *New in Chess*, No. 5, 1995, and Hurst, *Curse of Kirsan*. The "very busy that year with tournaments" comment is strange because the only chess he appears to have played in 1937 was the Levenfish match. Izmailov's fate was described by his son Nikolai in *Shakhmaty v Rossii*, No. 1-3, 1999. Shamkovich spoke of Botvinnik and Krylenko in Kasparov, *My Great Predecessors, Part II*. Malkin on the Levenfish match, in *Shakhmaty v Rossii*, No. 3, 1995. Levenfish prematch assessment, in *64*, May 24, 1937. Romanovsky's view was quoted by Voronkov in the article "Nashla Kosa Na Kamen" on www.chesspro.ru.

Botvinnik wrote about Kaminer in Kofman, *Izbranniye Etyudi S. Kaminer i M. Liburkin*. For Bulgakov and Krylenko, see *Rossiskiya Gazeta*, April 19, 2007. Korchnoi on AVRO, in *New in Chess*, No. 5, 1995. Igor Botvinnik on AVRO, in *64*, No 11, 1995. Botvinnik comment on AVRO's "worst" conditions comes from *Atlantic Chess News*, January 1974. For Fine's view see his *The World's Greatest Chess Games*. Analysis of Botvinnik–Capablanca in *64*, No. 12, 1980, No. 3, 1988, and No. 8, 2005. Ilyin-Genevsky and the Terror, *64*, No. 2, 2005.

Botvinnik's account of the meeting with Alekhine appeared in *Achieving the Aim* and Ragozin, *Shakhmaty za 1947–1949*. In the latter he said it was he who insisted on secrecy. The only money mentioned in this version was $6,700 as an "honorarium of the champion." In *Achieving the Aim* he said that at the post–AVRO meeting, the players discussed creating a "Club of the Eight Strongest" and the rules Fine and Euwe were to draw up would give each of the players "the formal right to challenge the champion." In *Analytical* Botvinnik mentioned only Moscow as a match venue.

Chapter 7

Botvinnik's chess section head election in Voronkov's article "Pod Kolesom Sudby" on www.chesspro.ru, which also has coverage of the 11th Soviet Championship. Averbakh on Kotov in *64*, No. 8, 2003. Botvinnik on Kotov in *64*, No. 3, 1981. Kasparov called him the "greatest match player" in *My Great Predecessors, Vol. II*. Kotov's comments on 11th Championship are from his *Zapiski Shakhmatista*. Kramnik's comments on Botvinnik are from his www.e3e5.com article "From Steinitz to Kasparov." Botvin-

nik on his Thermos, in *New in Chess*, No. 5, 1995. "The contents of Botvinnik's secret Thermos was a subject of discussion of many grandmasters," Viktor Malkin wrote in *64*, No. 11, 1997. "I recall the joking suggestion of A. Tolush that he wouldn't be surprised if what was in the Thermos turned out to be cognac." Botvinnik on teaching, in *64*, No. 11-12, 1994. Taimanov on his teaching, *64*, No. 10, 2003, and an interview with www.sportsdaily.ru on February 11, 2008.

Details of 12th Soviet Championship are from Voronkov's article "Stavka Bolshe chem Zhisn" and his account of the Absolute in "Operatsia 'Match-Turnir'" on www.chesspro.ru. Averbakh spoke of the demonstration board boys in *Vremya i Mui*, No. 12, 1994. Makogonov details are from *64*, No. 8, 2004. Typical of Botvinnik's disguising the way the Absolute came about was his comment in *Half a Century of Chess*: "It was decided in the spring of 1941 to hold a match-tournament...." Keres talked about the Absolute in *Sto Partii*. Averbakh on Keres is from a www.chesscafe.com interview, June 19, 2002.

Chapter 8

Botvinnik wrote about the war in *64*, No. 5, 1995, and *Achieving the Aim*. He didn't say when Vainshtein made his prediction. Korchnoi on bombing Liteiny is from an interview in *Izvestia*, January 27, 2009. Several accounts of Ilyin-Genevsky's death have said his wife Taisia Alexandrovna also died in the bombardment. But according to a www.e3e5.com article, "Desyat s Polovinoi Nedel; Voina i Smert A.F. Ilyin-Zheneveskovo," she survived but was so distraught over her husband's death that she committed suicide at a local hospital the same day. Korchnoi on blockade, *Izvestia*, January 27, 2009. For bread being used as currency, see Hurst, *Curse of Kirsan*.

Botvinnik on aging, in *64*, No. 7, 2001. Botvinnik on age 30–40, in *Shakhmaty*, No. 5, 1982. Smyslov commented on the 1943 Moscow Championship on www.crestbook.com, March 29, 2010. Botvinnik on choosing openings of "little popularity," in *64*, No. 13-14, 1994. Charushin's article on Junge appeared in *64*, No. 6, 1996. Igor Botvinnik's reply appeared in *64*, No. 8, 1996. Botvinnik called it the "Botvinnik system" in *64*, No. 17-18, 1994, the "Botvinnik Variation" in *Analytical*, the "so-called Botvinnik System" in *New in Chess*, No. 4, 1991, and "The Variation (Whose?)" in his 1951 prematch analysis, printed in *Match for the World Chess Champion, Botvinnik–Bronstein*, Moscow 1951. Botvinnik's analysis of 5. ... Ba5 in the French Defense also comes from that book.

Several details about the 13th Soviet Championship came from Voronkov's article "Zhiviye i Mertviye" on www.chesspro.ru. Smyslov spoke of Botvinnik and closed positions in *64*, No. 5, 1998. For Bronstein on Botvinnik-vs.-Vainshtein see *Shakhmaty v Rossii*, No. 4, 1996. For Malkin on Botvinnik-vs.-Vainshtein see *Shakhmaty v Rossi*, No. 5, 1995. For Vainshtein on Botvinnik see *Shakhmatny Vestnik*, No. 8-9, 1993. Voronkov wrote about Vainshtein in the article "Dvortsovy Perevorot" on www.chesspro.ru. In *Achieving the Aim*, Botvinnik ignored Alekhine's wartime activities and indicated it was only his status as a self-exile that was objected to. "All this had been thrashed out in the 1920s," he wrote. Botvinnik's requests for Alekhine match preparation appeared in *Chess Herald*, No. 1, 1994.

Under personal needs, Botvinnik asked for "accommodations for his mother in the therapy or neurology ward of the Kremlin hospital." He added, "She is currently a patient at the Gannushkin Psychiatric Clinic (the conditions are awful there!)." Botvinnik commented on Alekhine's anti–Semitic articles in *64*, No. 8, 2006. Averbakh pointed out, in *Sport-Express*, April 19, 2013, that Alekhine's last wife "was Jewish. Alexander feared that she would be sent to a concentration camp, therefore it was necessary to do what the Nazis ordered." Botvinnik's comments on the anti–Alekhine efforts by Western players come from Ragozin, *Shakhmaty za 1947–1949*. Botvinnik's telegram to Alekhine appeared in Linder, *Koroli Shakhmatnovo Mira*.

Paperno wrote about Alekhine's death in *Shakhmatny Vestnik*, No. 12, 1992. Botvinnik on Alekhine's death, in *64*, No. 2, 1992. Smyslov also expressed doubts about the official explanation, saying, "His death remains a mystery for me personally" in an interview on Radio Svoboda, September 19, 2005. The Romanov letter is from *64*, No. 5, 1998. Fine's comment on Botvinnik is from his *The World's a Chessboard*. Botvinnik's comment on Fine is from *64*, No. 11-12, 1993. Botvinnik on "six grandmasters," in *64*, No. 23-24, 1994.

Chapter 9

Botvinnik's "Plan of Action" appeared in *Match for the World Chess Championship*. For Pachman

on number 13, see *Pachman's Decisive Games*. Gligorić wrote of Botvinnik's blunder in his *The World Chess Championship*. Kholmov's background described in *64*, No. 5, 2000. Averbakh on "chess-knock-outer" is from a January 31, 2012, interview on www.tribuna.ru. Koblents comments on 1948 are from *Vospominaniye Shakhmatista*. Botvinnik's account of the run-up to The Hague appeared in *Achieving the Aim* and *Shakhmaty za 1947–1949*. The latter also has his comments on his 1948 games with Reshevsky.

Bronstein on Botvinnik in time trouble in *Shakhmatny Vestnik*, No. 3, 1995. Keres's resignation is described in Koblents, *Vospominaniye Shakhmatista*. The Max Pam interview appeared in *Vrij Nederland*, August 20, 1991, and was reported by Tim Krabbe on www.xs4all.nl. The Larsen-Keres talk comes from a Larsen interview in *Chess Horizons*, January-February 1990. Botvinnik on Estrin, in *64*, No. 5, 1987. Smyslov on Stalin, in *64*, No. 12, 200. Fine on Botvinnik–Keres in his *The World's Greatest Chess Games*. Keres cursing is quoted by Sosonko in *New in Chess*, No. 8, 2007. The suggestion of a Botvinnik nervous breakdown comes from *World Chess Champions*. The vote approving his dissertation comes from Linder, *Koroli Shakhmatnovo Mira*.

Averbakh on Budapest 1950, *64*, No. 6, 2003. Bronstein on Botvinnik's status as a scientist, *64*, No. 1, 2003. The reply appeared in *64*, No. 4, 2003. Tatiana Boleslavskaya on Bronstein, in *64*, No. 2, 2004. Bronstein's youth, in *64*, No. 10, 2002. Averbakh spoke of the Apollonov incident in *Sports-Express*, August 17, 2011. It wasn't until Viktor Baturinsky became director of the Central Chess Club in 1970 that he required Soviet players who went abroad to turn over tournament bulletins. The moves were entered on index cards that were filed in the club's second floor. See article by Rimma Bilunova, who prepared the cards, on www.chesspro.ru, January 21, 2010. Averbakh on Botvinnik vs. Beria, *64*, No. 8, 2011, *Sport Express*, March 5, 2010, and his *Centre-Stage and Behind the Scenes*. In the latter he said Malenkov told Botvinnik to meet him in Red Square in 20 minutes and "an entry pass will be ordered for you."

Taimanov on Botvinnik and Prokofiev, *64*, No. 8, 1987, but note that Botvinnik had also expressed more critical views of the composer's play in Chapter 2. Keres asking "The left or right one?" is from *64*, No. 8, 2006. Beilin on Bronstein, *64*, No. 3-4, 1994. Bronstein on draw offers, www.chesspro.ru, December 18, 2006. Gligorić on the duplicate envelopes and the importance of Botvinnik's dissertation, in his *The World Chess Championship*. Bronstein's comments on match games are from Vainshtein, *David Bronstein: Chess Improviser*. Malkin on Levenfish in *Shakhmaty v Rossii*, No. 3, 1995. Bronstein on the 21st game, in *64*, No. 5, 2000. Botvinnik wanting to play 24th game in separate room is from W. Winter, *The World Chess Championship 1951*.

Chapter 10

Spassky on Botvinnik comes from a Radio Svoboda interview, January 16, 2006. Malkin on Botvinnik and Ragozin, in *64*, No. 5, 1998. Korchnoi spoke of Botvinnik in 1952 on the 100th anniversary of Botvinnik's birth, August 2011. In *New in Chess*, No. 5, 1995, Korchnoi said he saw him in 1952: "I thought he was an old man. He was 41 years old." Abramov on Voronovo, in *64*, No. 1, 2003. Botvinnik's composition appeared in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, No. 7, 1953, and also in Baturinsky, *Shakhmatnoye Tvorchestvo Botvinnika*, Vol. 3. Averbakh's Voronovo comments come from an interview on www.tribuna.ru, July 18, 2012. Botvinnik's King's Gambit analysis is from Keres and Botvinnik's *Match-Turnir na Pervenstvo Mira po Shakhmatam*. Bronstein's article on Zürich 1953 appeared in *64*, No. 10, 2001. Taimanov remembered Zürich in a www.chessville.com interview, April 7, 2004.

Averbakh spoke of Smyslov-vs.-Botvinnik in a www.chesscafe.com interview, June 19, 2002. Averbakh on Botvinnik and Kan, in *64*, No. 8, 2011. Averbakh on Botvinnik's training games and not liking to fly comes from a *Sport-Express* interview, August 17, 2011. His comments on being a sparring partner are from *64*, No. 8, 2011. For Botvinnik's daughter on the 1954 match, see Kentler's "Poklon Botvinniku" on www.e3e5.com. Bronstein on Botvinnik and 1954 team matches, in *64*, No. 5, 2000. For Panov on Botvinnik, see *64*, No. 10, 1996. Clock times of the 15th game are from Golombek's *World Chess Championship 1954*. Kramnik comments are from his www.e3e5.com article "From Steinitz to Kasparov."

Averbakh cited Botvinnik's letter to the Central Committee in *64*, No. 8, 2011, and a www.chesscafe.com interview, 2002. In that interview

Averbakh described Botvinnik's efforts to create the rematch provision. Botvinnik on the Central Committee letter, *64*, No. 20, 1991. For Botvinnik trying to get into 1956 Candidates tournament, see *64*, No. 8, 2001. Botvinnik described defending the interests of chess in *64*, No. 8, 2009. Minev on Botvinnik–Gligorić in *Mastering Tactical Ideas*. Spassky on Botvinnik insisting on a rematch within one year is from an interview in *Vechernyaya Moskva*, October 17, 2007. He said the original rematch rule called for it to be played within two years after the first match.

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Chapter 11

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Chapter 12

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